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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DON'T, JACK!" SHE SAID. "YOU DON'T KNOW, OR YOU WOULD HATE ME!"

EVER YOURS.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

GUNN'S CORNER it was always called; one of four crossways, and the only one where a human habitation stood, from the occupant of which, in years gone by, it had derived its name. But old Gunn had been dead long ago, and the house had undergone quite a change, through being modernised by his successors, that had he risen from his grave he would have been puzzled to know it in its present state.

It had been built some distance from the road in front, whilst it was crouched up close to a wall which divided it from the one which ran by the side, thus giving plenty of space in the opposite direction for the pretty green lawn, studded here and there with drooping beech trees, and

belted around with thick shrubs which spread beyond.

It was here a new wing had been added, which, whilst improving the interior, gave to the building without a strange mixture of architecture ancient and modern; the windows on the one side consisting of little glass in much wood, and on the other little wood and much glass; the entrance door, originally in the centre, assuming the appearance of a half barrel set on end; and for miles round there was no uglier building to be seen than that queer red house at Gunn's Corner, so in contrast, as it was, to the pretty grounds in which it was placed.

It was these with which Captain Merrivale and his young wife were so charmed that they decided to become the purchasers of the place, and considered themselves fortunate in procuring, for the few hundreds asked, such a paradise as to them it appeared.

And so it was that, twenty years since, they came to live there, the old name clinging to it still, as persistently as the ivy which had clung

to the gable end even before the time of old Gunn himself.

George Merrivale had retired from the army when he took possession, those twenty years past, thus committing, his father told him, another folly in addition to the one of which he had been already guilty, in marrying a girl without a penny, when for just opening his lips he might have wed the daughter and heiress of an American millionaire.

True, George loved his profession, and it was not without a regret that he had laid aside his uniform for a civilian's life, bidding good-bye with a heavy heart to his old comrades when he went with them for the last time to Portsmouth, from whence they sailed for India. But his marriage with Rath Maitland he never regretted; nor for one moment did his mind revert to the American's gold, though he would jokingly tell his wife, how, many times, it would have relieved him of the anxiety which the increasing expenses of each year caused him.

But they seemed so poorer for the little

months which had to be filled, and the little bodies which had to be clothed, each one as they came knitting their lives closer together; and then a terrible trouble came to the house at Gunn's Corner.

Captain Merrivale was seized with an illness, which after a few short weeks ended in death; and Ruth, with her four daughters, were left to buffet the world alone.

At first the girls feared for the life of their mother, which trembled in the balance; but for their sake she fought against the dreadful sorrow, to which she had so nearly succumbed, arising, as it were, from the grave to watch over their future.

Poor George had not much to leave, but it was sufficient to keep them still with her in the old house, until they should, as it was probable they would, marry.

With the exception of Netta, the eldest, they were not attractive, and did not, in the opinion of onlookers, stand much chance of retrieving their fortunes in the matrimonial market. Mrs. Postlethwaite, the Squire's lady, confiding to Mrs. Orran, the clergyman's wife, that she feared poor Mrs. Merrivale would have them on her hands for many a long year.

But Ruth, to whom it mattered most, thought least of any advantage she might derive from the parting with her children, feeling, as she did, that they were all she had now to make life worth the living; the while all, save Netta, had no thought, no aspiration beyond the society they had cultivated in the vicinity of the Corner.

It was three months now since George had been laid to rest in the pretty churchyard, hidden amid the trees in the distance, and where the weeping willow bent low over his grave.

Letters of condolence, which had come to Ruth in her first great sorrow like knives, opening afresh the wound she had striven so hard to heal, had now ceased; and even she, to the outside world, was beginning to resume her former self, when she received from her sister, who had married a wealthy husband, an invitation that one of her girls should come to her.

"I have only two, dear, you know," the letter ran, "and I think your eldest must be about the age of my Gertie. John is a great big fellow of twenty-four, and, like all boys, very little at home; so that his sister would be delighted to have one of her cousins here, notwithstanding that she just worships Jack's shadow, which is about all she has the chance of doing. The London season is now commencing, during which we shall go to Brighton or Scarborough, and we can't expect young people to grieve all their youth away, however much they may have loved the dead. So let one of them come. Which it is to be I will leave to yourselves, but whoever comes I will make them happy.

"Your loving sister, HELEN."

Mrs. Merrivale handed the letter across the breakfast-table to where her eldest daughter was seated behind a hissing urn.

"Well, what do you think of it, dear?" she asked, when, after having read its contents, Netta returned it to her.

"One scarcely knows what to say," the girl answered, the while she had arisen from the table, and proceeded to view herself in the large glass over the chimney-piece, which not only reflected her own pretty face and figure, but showed to great disadvantage, in comparison, the plain features and not too tidy dress of her two younger sisters, the baby, as they called the other, not being visible in her place close to her mother's side.

"I don't think you would like Josephine to visit anyone until she learns to put a necessary stitch, where now, when occasion requires it, she puts instead a large plai, whilst Lottie is far too tomboyish to mix in London society," and Netta turned round the while she was speaking with a disdainful look at her two sisters.

"The truth is, you want to go yourself, Netta," Josephine said, with flaming cheeks, at the same time she was busily engaged hiding the

white head of the unfortunate pin which had thus betrayed itself in the folds of her black dress.

"You need not look at me either," Lottie chimed in. "I would as soon go to prison as be cooped up in a London house, with no fowls, pigs, rabbits, or anything else to keep one alive," and having finished her breakfast, she commenced braiding a whip for baby, who clung to her mother in expression of what her unspoken wishes were.

"My dear children, there is no need to quarrel," said Mrs. Merrivale. "If Netta would like to go, much as I shall miss her, I will write to Aunt Helen to-day and accept the invitation for her."

"Of course she wants to go, mamma," they both answered in chorus. "What is the good of having a pretty face, oh! to hide your beauty in the country?" and they laughed.

"There is no danger of your hiding yours anywhere!" was Netta's retort; and then the while Josephine and Lottie, their arms entwined around each other's waist, went into the garden to see their pots, she remained behind to arrange with Mrs. Merrivale the reply that should be sent to London.

"Will you miss me very much, dear?" she asked, throwing herself on her mother's feet; "but I think it will be best for all that I should go. I might marry some one very rich, and then you should never be poor any more. It is so dreadful, is it not, dearest, this pinching and scrawling just to make two ends meet? Oh! I could never wed anyone who had not plenty of money."

"My darling! you think so now," and Mrs. Merrivale looked with a soft smile on the girl kneeling there, her beautiful violet eyes upraised to hers, and the pretty red-gold curls nestling on her clear white forehead, whilst the colour, as of a blush rose, suffused her cheek.

"I shall always think so," she answered. "I'd marry a man as old as Methuselah, and as ugly as sin, if he were only wealthy."

"And be unhappy for ever after! Gold will never purchase love, Netta!"

"Love is all very well, mamma, dear; but when it is allied with poverty it soon takes wings."

"We were poor, your father and I, and love never flew from us!"

"You were an exceptional couple," Netta answered; "but the privations you bore without a murmur would just kill me."

Ruth Merrivale said no more then, the tears starting to her eyes as she recalled to her memory those happy days which, with all their poverty, had been so rich in happiness to her—never, till that day when she closed her darling's eyes, knowing what it was to feel poor.

But Netta's warm kisses on her sunken cheek recalled her to herself. A wan, sad smile passed over her features, and then she passed her hand over her sunny hair.

"I shall miss you, my child," she said; "but I could not be so selfish as to stand in your light."

And so, a short while after, an answer was sent to Aunt Helen's letter, and in a few days' time Netta was the first to fly from the home nest.

CHAPTER II.

Mrs. SUGDEN had sent to the station to meet her niece on her arrival, and she and Gertie were watching at the window of their house in Upper Berkeley-street when the carriage returned.

She was a kind, motherly woman, and although really younger than Mrs. Merrivale, looked, by reason of her stoutness, considerably older.

"The train must have been late, my dear," she said, when, after having kissed Netta, and taken off her dust cloak, which she gave to a servant, she led her to where Gertie was awaiting her, lying on a sofa drawn close to the window.

"You see, dear, my poor little girl is an invalid," Mrs. Sugden said, "or she would have

come downstairs with me to welcome her cousin."

"Oh! I am so sorry," Netta answered, grasping the girl's hand, and thinking the while how delicate and transparent it was; and her face, how lovely, with a faint rose tinge on the alabaster skin, contrasting it, as she did in her mind, with Josephine's sallow complexion, and her sister suffering thereby.

"You mustn't be sorry," Gertie said, "I am very happy, and it is only now and then that the pain is so very great, when all are so good to me, that the days never seem long, although I have never been otherwise since I can remember."

"Are you always ill, then? Always have been ill?" Netta asked, looking in amazement on the patient, sweet face before her.

"Yes, through the carelessness of a nurse who let her fall when she was an infant. But after your journey I am sure you will wish to perform your toilet, and you and Gertie can have a long chat together," saying which Mrs. Sugden led her niece from the room, having tenderly kissed the afflicted girl resting on the couch.

To Netta the room assigned her appeared a perfect bower of loveliness. Sweet-scented flowers disposed here and there in tiny vases, spreading their perfume around; the blue and lace of the furniture and hangings seeming to her as the abode of some fairy princess.

A little yellow songster was trilling merrily in his golden cage, suspended by a blue ribbon from the gilded cornice; the while a tiny kitten of pure white was curled round on a chair beneath, with a ribbon of the same colour round its neck, in a sound sleep.

Oh! how different to the surroundings of Gunn's Corner, where even the old cats roamed about uncared for, and the young ones had no place but the hay-loft in which to gambol, and in her ecstasy of delight Netta threw her arms around her aunt's neck.

"How kind, how good," she said, "to prepare such a paradise for me! I can never thank you enough, dear auntie!" and then as a maid entered the room, Mrs. Sugden disengaged herself from the girl's embraces, telling her they would await her in the drawing-room previous to dinner.

Netta was not long dressing, inwardly feeling thankful she was in mourning, as her gowns would not look so countryfied, notwithstanding their provincial make, as though they had been coloured. And the little maid who attended her, what a knock she had of arranging her yellow-gold hair in the most becoming style, setting a blood-red rose tastefully on one side amid its coils, and another at her throat; touching the folds of her dress here and there, until she almost started at the reflection of her own figure in the glass before her.

Gertie was alone when she re entered the drawing-room, replacing the tiny gold watch she was studying when Netta advanced.

"It is time Jack was home," she said. "I am so anxious to introduce you to each other. He is so good, dear, dear Jack! You can't help liking him. Bring that low chair and sit down here by me, and I will tell you what he is like," and she was about to commence with a description of his different features when a loud knock and ring arrested her attention. "There he is!" she cried, delightfully, and shortly after the heavy tread of a masculine foot was heard on the tessellated floor without.

"He wouldn't go up to dress without seeing me first, my darling!" she said, when the handle of the door turning, it was soon opened, and a young man of about twenty-four entered the room.

He was a young giant in proportions, with a round, good-natured face, and laughing, hazel eyes, bearing but a slight, if any, resemblance to his beautiful sister, who so doted on him.

Like a girl's the colour flew to his face when he perceived that Gertie was not alone, and then a something he had forgotten apparently returned to his memory, for after having bestowed the usual kiss on the little invalid, he turned with extended hand to Netta.

"My cousin, I conjecture," he stammered. "I am so glad. Gertie will have a companion now."

It is so dull for her, poor child, when I am away all day," and he looked admiringly on the fair young figure before him.

But Netta did not make much reply; she felt shy in the society of this youthful Hercules, her face beneath his glance becoming crimson as the rose at her throat, when Mrs. Sugden entered the room, Jack speedily made his exit to prepare for dinner.

Shortly after they repaired to the dining-room, Gerlie's repast being taken to her where she was; and beneath the influence of her cousin's interesting conversation and her aunt's kindness, Netta's timidity disappeared, and she soon felt as one of the family.

"Isn't he a darling!" Gerlie asked, when, dinner over, Netta again came to her side, the while Mrs. Sugden indulged in her usual nap, and the darling, of whom she was speaking, in his cigar.

But to wish that she had had a brother was Netta's evasive reply, the while she was thinking Jack would not be a bad exchange for Josephine, whom she felt sure would never be a credit to the family.

How quickly the weeks passed now, and Netta was quite astonished when, in a letter from Mrs. Merrivale, she reminded her it was now a month since she had received a line from her.

She was in great trouble, for baby had caught the measles, and she was afraid she would lose her; and the poor wee thing in her delirium would ask so pitifully to see Netty that, if possible, she hoped she would return for a few days to Gunn's Corner. It might be the last she would see of her tiny sister.

"Mamma always thinks they are going to die if their little fingers ache!" Netta said, when her aunt told her to act as she wished with regard to her mother's letter. Perhaps it would be better if she went.

But to her niece the bare idea of a return to Gunn's Corner seemed repugnant. To go back to the home where but one servant did the general work of the house, where there was an absence of all the luxuries to which even in that short month she had now become accustomed, was distasteful; and even Jack said measles was not a dangerous complaint, and very likely Aunt Ruth was frightening herself without a reason.

"Lady Warton's ball was arranged for the fifteenth, and he should be so sorry that she should miss it. Would it not be sufficient to telegraph to her mother asking if there was immediate danger; if so to wire back at once?"

And Gerlie, lying on her sofa by the open window, heard all that passed, thinking, the while her heart ached for the little sufferer calling in vain for her absent sister, how differently she would have acted had she been similarly placed.

Jack did not stay with her now so much, talking, reading to her as he had done in the old days before Netta came; and maybe feeling sad herself she had more sympathy with the sick baby, whose incessant cry was for Netty.

But no reply telegram came, and so Netta's dress was ordered and made for the ball on the fifteenth, without a further thought in her mind for the little life which was ebbing fast at the old home.

"I want to speak to you, Jack," Gerlie said, when a day or two previous he just looked into the drawing-room, where she was in her customary place, but no one being with her was about to retire.

He advanced then, kissing her in his usual way.

"What is it, Gerlie?" he asked.

"Don't grow too fond of Netta!"

They were only simple words, but she raised her eyes to his then, and an angry flush rose to his face.

"I don't understand," he said. "Surely you are not jealous or selfish enough to expect a brother to give up all love for your sake!"

"Jack!"

It was all she said, but there was such a touch of wounded feeling in her tone, such a world of

reproach in the sad look of her beautiful eyes, that the next moment he was on his knees by her side.

"Forgive me, little sister!" he said, "and do not tell me to give up the one dream of my life; for loving Netta fondly, devotedly as I do, I shall never love you less, darling!"

"And you have asked her!"

"To be my wife! Yes, Gerlie; and she has consented!"

But there came no congratulation from the girl's lips, only a dumb sense of agony suppressed passed over her countenance; but not until he had left her, not till the door had closed between her and all that was dearest to her, did the scalding tears rush to her eyes, forcing their way through the white fingers she had raised to stem their course. And then she turned, moaning like one in pain; and his voice, singing her favourite song, came to her through the open window.

Mrs. Sugden came to her as she lay, but her eyes were closed, and she did not stay to notice that the lashes were wet with the tears she had shed, and so she gently shut the door behind her, leaving her alone with her untold grief.

But, after that, a strange shrinking from Jack's society came over her; and although her countenance would for a moment brighten when she heard his step, it was gone when he made his appearance; the while the old endearing terms with which she had ever greeted him now seldom passed her lips.

"Make him happy, dear, and may Heaven bless you!" was all she said when Netta told her of her engagement, after which the subject was seldom mooted between them, Mrs. Sugden apparently being the only one who was aware that a change had come over the sick girl.

But she never named it, only sitting with her more, and administering to her in all her little wants.

"Will you trust me, Gerlie!" she said, when on one occasion they had been alone some time. "I think I can guess."

But the girl made no reply, only burying her face on her shoulder, while the sobs she could no longer restrain shook her delicate frame.

"If I could have foreseen this, Gerlie, you should never have known—" Mrs. Sugden said, and then Jack's knock resounded on the street door.

She kissed her fondly, and moved from her side as he entered the room.

"I have ordered the carriage for ten o'clock, mother," he said; "will that be too soon?" and then he advanced to Gerlie, kissing her tenderly, and telling her not to sit up, as Netta would tell her all about the ball the next day.

CHAPTER III.

THEY had gone now. Gerlie had seen them from the open window, Netta's blue and silver dress plainly visible beneath the opera cloak, edged with swansdown, she wore over her shoulders.

And how beautiful she looked! Her red gold hair as a coronet, with the tiny curls resting on her white forehead.

No wonder Jack loved her. Could she blame him? And she would have stood up that she might have seen her own face, no less lovely in the opposite mirror, forgetting for the moment that she was a cripple; and then she fell back amid the cushions, hiding her face and her agony on the silken covering.

A servant came in to light her reading-lamp, placing her book and hand-bell within reach; and thinking she was asleep, went out. And she, with that dreadful pain at her heart, lay there, raising before her a future in which she could see his weighed down with just such grief as was now breaking hers.

It was then the door re-opened, and she raised herself to receive a telegram the man brought her.

"It is for Miss Merrivale, miss. Reply paid."

"Eleven o'clock," she said, looking at the

timepiece, ticking those minutes so speedily away, and Netta's baby sister, for she knew its purport, waiting to bid Netta good-bye, and then re-directing the envelope, she gave orders that the boy should be told to deliver it at once at Lady Warton's.

But hour succeeded hour, and still they remained away. Gerlie's maid had endeavoured to persuade her young mistress to retire to rest; but she said no; she would stay on the sofa until their return, and so the night passed, the grey streaks of morning gradually entering within the room, and the yellow gas looking weird and ghastly in the light of the advancing day.

"My dear child, you still up! How could you be so unwise!"

It was Mrs. Sugden who spoke; for Gerlie had just awoke from the temporary sleep into which she had fallen, and in which they had found her on their return from the ball.

But she merely opened her eyes in a half-dazed way, looking around her almost wildly; and then there came to her recollection the events of the night which had passed.

"Where is she? Netta, is she gone!" she asked.

"Gone! gone where?" and Mrs. Sugden looked at the girl, thinking she was dreaming. "Netta is gone to bed, my child, and I see that you must go too, at once!"

"But the telegram! Has she not had it?"

"What telegram?" Mrs. Sugden, asked. "We have not long returned from Lady Warton's; but nothing has been given to us!"

And then Gerlie told her of the one which had arrived from Mrs. Merrivale; but there was no alternative at that hour but to wait until Netta had had her rest, and trust to fate that it would not be too late.

But it was noon before she came down. Another message had arrived, preceding by a few moments the one of the previous evening, which had been sent with a letter from her ladyship apologising for the neglect of her servants in allowing it to have remained undelivered; but hoping it was not a serious matter! However, it was over now; the baby's life had fed! The tiny spark died out, and Netta the while in the full enjoyment of her first dance.

She tore open the yellow envelope when they gave it her, her heavy eyes filling with tears when she read its contents, and in that moment her better nature prevailed. She forgot her conquests, her vanity, all but the love for the little spirit which had passed away, with Netty, her name, the last upon its lips.

To return to Gunn's Corner now would be useless, and she felt she could not bear to be a witness of her mother's grief, the while Josephine's reproaches would be like daggers running into her heart. And so she wrote a long letter home, telling Mrs. Merrivale how it was she did not respond to the first telegram, and the intense sorrow it had occasioned her.

Gerlie was too overpowered with fatigue to put in an appearance until late in the day, Mrs. Sugden also remaining in her own room, and so Jack was the only one to offer her consolation in her trouble. But she scarcely answered him, remaining with her face buried in her hands, the sobs which escaped her alone speaking of the intensity of her emotion; and when the door was opened to announce a visitor, she escaped from the room to the one adjoining.

It was Lord Gothard, to whom they had been introduced the previous evening, when, claiming to have been an old friend of the late Mr. Sugden, he had begged to be allowed to be the same to his family.

Mrs. Sugden was only too glad to know one who had been her husband's friend; and when he craved the permission of calling was delighted that he should do so.

He was an elderly man, looking even older in the daylight than when, on the occasion of Lady Warton's ball, he had so often become Netta's partner, to Jack's great annoyance—an annoyance he had not forgotten—and when his lordship was announced there was a certain amount of hauteur in his bearing which the other could not fail to observe.

It was then Mrs. Sugden, with Gertie leaning on her for support, entered the room.

"Lord Gothard, how kind!" the elder lady said, when, having told her son to assist Gertie to her sofa, she pressed the hand of the nobleman.

"I was afraid I should not have had this pleasure," he answered, returning her greeting; but all the while his eyes were fixed on the invalid girl, and Mrs. Sugden fancied she detected something like a start in his manner, when Jack, having arranged her cushions, she raised her eyes to where they were.

"You must accept my apology," her mother said. "But I quite forgot, I have not introduced you to my little girl here."

He advanced then to where she was, looking down kindly on the pretty upturned face, a shadow passing over his own.

But it was momentary. A few minutes after he was chatting with her, expressing his deep regret when they told him how it was that Netta was absent.

"I am an old bachelor," he was telling Gertie, "but invariably have a gathering in the autumn at my country place, and I think you would become quite strong there. The air is so beautiful that we must ask mamma to bring you to Castle Towers, then, when London becomes unbearable."

Shortly after he left, Jack declaring he was an old bore, Mrs. Sugden the while telling him he ought to be ashamed of himself. But the truth was he was jealous because the old bore, as he called him, had paid such attention to pretty Netta at the ball.

"I am not jealous," Jack said, colouring to the roots of his hair. "But with one foot in the grave I should think he would have shown more sense to have kept in the card-room than to have made an exhibition of himself by attempting to dance."

"One foot in the grave," Mrs. Sugden repeated. "What nonsense! A man not yet sixty, and with a rent-roll of thirty thousand a-year or more—there are many girls who would not believe him that age."

"I am astonished, mother! I had no idea you could be so mercenary."

But Mrs. Sugden only smiled. She rather enjoyed a passage of words with her son, who invariably retired from the engagement declaring himself beaten.

But on this occasion Jack was not in the mood to acknowledge himself in the wrong. So merely saying he was late for his office he moved towards where Gertie was reclining by the window, gave her the customary kiss, and telling his mother he might not be home to dinner, he left the room.

Netta came in shortly after, her eyes red with weeping. She had written a long letter to Mrs. Merrivale, consoling her in her great grief.

"And so you are not going to the funeral, Netta?" Mrs. Sugden said, her niece having told her what she had written.

"I would rather not," she answered, and seating herself beside her cousin, she passed her hand listlessly over her hair.

The events at Lady Warton's were not referred to, even Lord Gothard's visit allowed to pass by unnoticed; the hours dragging wearily on, that each and all were thankful when the gloomy day had drawn to an end.

Even without there seemed a sympathy with their feelings, for the bright sun of the early morning had become obscured by dark lowering clouds, which threatened a heavy storm.

And all this while, with bowed head and streaming eyes, Ruth Merrivale sat beside the dead form of her little girl, the rain without falling gently amid the full-leaved branches of the trees around Gann's Corner, and letting it drop on the soft turf beneath, as though they too were weeping for the tiny life that had gone from their midst.

"Mamma, you will be quite ill if you stop here," Josephine said, and she led her from the room, missing as she did at each step the baby voice, which would come to her in the past, making her feel rich in all the poverty against

which she had had to struggle since George had been laid to rest beneath the willow in the pretty churchyard beyond.

"Do you think Netta will come?" she asked, looking up to her daughter's face.

"Are we not sufficient, Lottie and I?" Josephine answered, a sign of jealousy in her tone, and Mrs. Merrivale pressed her arm, drawing her down that she might kiss her lips.

It was the only answer she gave, and until her letter arrived on the following day Netta's name was not mentioned between them.

"And so she is not coming?" the girl said. "I never thought she would," they both agreed; but her mother thought less of her absence now that the little voice was for ever still, which had cried so pitifully for Netty, Netty.

CHAPTER IV.

For the week or two succeeding her sister's death Netta did not care to indulge in the enjoyments which otherwise she would have entered into; and so on many occasions she would remain at home during the absence of Mrs. Sugden and Gertie, who went out driving daily.

Jack, too, was unavoidably frequently absent; and when Lord Gothard called at these times, which he often did, it was Mrs. Merrivale alone who was there to receive him.

The London season was drawing to a close now; the heat, which was unbearable, making most think of leaving town even before the usual time.

"Has Mrs. Sugden fixed on any spot at present?" his lordship asked Netta, when on one of his visits, and she alone was present, they had been discussing the different places of resort.

"I don't think so," she answered, the while her eyes drooped, and the colour rose to her temples beneath his admiring gaze, which she could not fail to understand.

"Persuade her, then, to accept my invitation to Castle Towers," he said. "It is within a drive of the sea, and surrounded by the loveliest country in all England, situated, as it is, in its very garden. And I can assure you of not only a happy visit, but a hearty welcome."

"You are very kind, Lord Gothard," Netta stammered.

"The kindness will be on your side," he answered, "if you will promise to grace the Towers with your presence."

He would have lifted her hand to his lips, but a sudden coolness in her demeanour prevented him, and then he went on.

"It is an old place, very much beaten and battered about by old time, but to me a small paradise, standing surrounded, as it is, by the rich foliage of mighty trees which have sheltered it through many a century, in parts the ivy clinging to it still, and covering its ancient walls even where they have crumbled away."

He laughed then.

"Do not think but what it is habitable; in fact, within the arrangements are quite modern, nothing that is weird or unearthly to detract from its comfort, but everything that is beautiful in its surroundings—flowers exhaling the sweetest perfume, birds singing the sweetest songs. There is everything at Castle Towers which lacks but one addition to make it perfect."

And then he ceased speaking, only looking on the fair young face in its girlish beauty, and he would have spoken again, but the door opening the words died on his lips, as Mrs. Sugden, followed by Gertie, leaning on the arm of her maid, entered the room.

"Lord Gothard, I am delighted!" and the elder lady held out her hand in welcome. But over Gertie's fair face there passed like a spasm of pain, and it was only with a faint voice she returned his salutation.

"I have been expressing my wish to Mrs. Merrivale that you should visit her and Mrs. Sugden honour an old bachelor with your presence at his place in the country," his lordship said. "I

do not think you would regret it, and I can assure you every comfort, and, for your little invalid here, every care. Mrs. Merrivale tells me you have made no decision at present, and I have only to give instructions to the housekeeper there, and everything will be in readiness. Only name the day, Mrs. Sugden, and you will confer an everlasting favour on me in my solitude."

"I should scarcely have believed Lord Gothard to be a sufferer from loneliness," that lady answered, smiling. "But much as I feel your kindness in offering us your hospitality, I must, I fear, consult my son's movement before I can decide on accepting it."

"Bring him with you. Splendid shooting, and I will invite one or two young fellows to meet him."

Jack came in then, almost ungraciously acquiescing in the arrangement ultimately arrived at, that they should accept his lordship's invitation to Castle Towers.

"I would rather it had been anywhere else that we had been going to," Gertie told Jack confidentially later on, and would have said more had not the remembrance of how he received her last warning preyed upon her mind.

But on this occasion his views entirely coincided with her own.

"You don't wish it more than I do, little one," he said, caressing her in the old way, until she forgot the late coolness which had arisen between them, gaining courage the while they became to each other as they were before Netta came.

"I should be so grieved, Jack, should this visit be the cause of bringing trouble to you," she added, raising her blue eyes suffused with tears to his face.

"What trouble should it bring to me, Gertie? Surely you don't think Netta would throw me over for a decrepit old man like Lord Gothard?" and Jack laughed outright.

But Gertie's mind was too much disturbed to join in his merriment.

"He is not decrepit, and can scarcely be called an old man," she said, "and he is enormously rich!"

The last argument had the greatest effect, and one which for the moment silenced Jack. But then he had not heard Netta's assertion that she would marry a man as old as Methuselah, and as ugly as sin, provided he was wealthy.

However, it was impossible to call back now. Only two days intervened before the time arranged for their departure to South Devon; and if Netta's love was as true as he believed it to be, it would stand the test of a greater temptation than the owner of Castle Towers had to offer.

Mrs. Sugden declared him to be a charming man, and was looking forward with delight to the prospect of their visit, the preparations for which had so fully occupied her time and thoughts that she had given little heed to other matters more than the dresses they would require.

"It is a thousand pities you are in mourning, my dear!" she told her niece; "for although black is very becoming to anyone with your complexion and hair, still one can make so little change, and you would have looked lovely in a costume similar to this," showing her one from the latest modes, which the dressmaker had specified as being most suitable to a young lady of her age.

And Gertie lay on her couch, taking in all these little arrangements and regrets which her mother indulged in, looking into the future in her day-dreams, and wondering within herself how it would all end.

But even she was not sorry when the day arrived on which they were to leave the metropolis.

It was very hot and miserable in London, and the closed shutters and blinds gave to the fashionable quarters a deserted look, which was almost depressing; and when a few days after they had arrived at their journey's end the first sight she obtained of the Devon hills and slopes filled her with ecstasy, with the sun shining, its

rays softened by the approaching eventide over the green and yellow earth.

Castle Towers stood far from the road, amid the trees which surrounded it, hiding it so completely in the distance that had it not been for the smoke emanating from its chimneys, and the two turreted towers, from which it derived its name, becoming visible, one would have looked on it as a small forest.

Lord Gothard was there to receive them, and to see that every attention should be paid the little invalid.

Even Jack could not say he had overrated the beauty of Castle Towers, from the windows of which the gardens and terraces fragrant with the breath of sweet-scented flowers, and on to which they opened, were visible on the one side, while at the end an immense conservatory, filled with rare exotics, where birds of rare plumage kept up a continual concert, was alone parted by heavy velvet curtains with rich lace beneath from the drawing-room, with its luxurious furniture of gold, upholstered with light blue and lace in unison with the hangings. Oil paintings of priceless value adorned the walls, while here and there groups of statuary in spotless white marble stood in corners.

His lordship was justly proud of his beautiful home, and it was with a feeling of satisfaction he noted the delight pictured on the countenances of his guests when they witnessed the magnificence of his surroundings.

They did not go out that evening, the fatigue of the journey giving them no other desire than to sit there by the open windows, to feast their eyes on the landscape without, and listen to the singing of the feathered pets.

But even they had sung their last note.

It was growing late now. Gerlie, from the sofa where she was reclining, had watched the sun go down in a sea of blood and gold, until even the trees became hushed and still.

The little leaves whispering to each other in the brambles overhead, and mingling with the dripping of the fountain, its waters falling like fairy bells into a golden reservoir, was the only sound to be heard.

The gentlemen had gone out to smoke their cigars, the perfume arising within, and then the shadows of night fell over all, and thus the first day at Castle Towers came to a close.

CHAPTER V.

LORD GOTHARD was true to his promise. Shooting, riding, and billiards provided amusement enough for Jack and the young fellows, Captain Harland and the Hon. Fitzgibbon, who had received invitations to meet him, while the ladies were never weary, so numerous were the resources they had at hand whereby to kill time.

Mrs. Cross, the housekeeper, had been a lady whom reduced circumstances and the death of an indulgent husband had obliged to take the situation she now held in his lordship's establishment.

"And I consider myself a most fortunate woman in having obtained it," she told Mrs. Sugden, who having on two or three occasions noticed her well-bred manner, when she had made inquiries that everything was, she hoped, as that lady wished, and a kind of friendship had arisen between them.

"Have you held it long?" Mrs. Sugden asked, referring to the situation.

"For years," was the reply. "I was quite young when I first came, just after the death of Lady Gothard."

"His lordship has been married, then?"

"Well—yes," she answered, "and a miserable marriage it was—a woman old enough to be his mother. And from what I have heard since I have been in the family, it was to save Castle Towers that it was contracted, for the old lord lived so extravagantly that there was little else left for his son when he succeeded him than the title—the estate being mortgaged beyond its value. So it was at the instigation of his mother—who died shortly afterwards—that he formed

this unhappy union at the same time that he was deeply attached to a young lady; and, in fact, it was rumoured that she was the real Lady Gothard, there having been a private wedding. But of course this is only hearsay; and I am sure, Mrs. Sugden, I can rely on you not to repeat anything I have said, for it matters little now, the poor thing being dead also—dying, they say, of a broken heart."

"Of course, there were no children?"

Mrs. Cross hesitated a moment before replying.

"I think the poor young wife left one behind her. But, notwithstanding that his lordship endeavoured to discover what had become of it, further than its birth he knew nothing."

"I suppose you never heard the girl's name?"

The housekeeper turned sharply round, something in the other's tone putting her on her guard.

"I am as ignorant on that point as you are, Mrs. Sugden," she said; and then, adding that her duties would not allow of her remaining longer, with an apology she passed from the room.

"I wish she had heard her name," Mrs. Sugden said to herself, when alone.

She sat down by the open window, looking out on the wide expanse of beautiful landscape beyond, then, scarcely wondering that a man should sin to remain master of it all.

"And, after all," she mused, "what does it matter, one heart more or less broken, and then forgetfulness and the grave?"

But she could not conquer the curiosity which had taken possession of her to find out the name of the deserted wife.

"I am sure that woman knows," was her inward conviction. And then her eyes fell on Netta, who, with his lordship, just came in sight.

He was bending low, and Mrs. Sugden wondered whether it was solely through deafness that his face was in such close proximity to the fair young beauty of his companion. But when they drew nearer, and her niece, raising her head, caught a glimpse of her from the window, she saw how the bright colour had dyed her cheek and brow, and "Poor Jack," was the only comment she made.

She went downstairs then to the drawing-room, where she had left Gerlie.

Captain Harland was talking to her, the while Jack and Herbert Fitzgibbon were conversing together by another window.

But her son raising his head when she entered, she knew that he also had seen the same as she had.

But he turned away his face then, for Lord Gothard and Netta were advancing; he would not let them see the agony he was suffering, and which was drawing his features like those of an old man.

But Netta was very kind to him that evening, singing to him the songs he loved best, and looking on him so sadly. And then, saying she did not feel very well, she asked him to take her from the heat of the room out into the soft air, for she felt she could not breathe.

And so they strolled up and down the broad terraces beneath the silent stars, and he could almost feel the fluttering of her heart, it beat so loud.

"What is it, Netta?" he asked.

But for a while she could not answer, and then he knew that she was crying.

"Netta, tell me what grieves you, darling?" and he would have put his arm around her waist, drawing her towards him, but she shrank from his embrace.

"Don't, don't Jack," she said. "You don't know, or you would hate me."

It was then the terrible truth revealed itself to him, and for the moment he was bereft of speech; but, recovering himself,—

"I could never hate you, Netta," he said. "Whatever it may be, and I think I can guess, that has come between us, I shall ever love you, love you to the end! But don't deceive me, tell me it is true—has Castle Towers proved too tempting a bait?"

He stood erect before her now, she with her

head bent, and the rays of the moon falling on the gold of her yellow hair, the shimmer of her white dress giving to her presence an ethereal light in the semi-darkness.

"Don't judge me too harshly, Jack! We are so poor, you know, and with money I could do so much to lighten their burden at Gunn's Corner."

"I am answered, Netta," and he would have passed her by, leaving her alone in the starlight; but she looked so wretched, so grief-stricken, that, forgetting his own sorrow, forgetting how she had trodden his most holy affections in the dust, he turned.

"My darling, for the last time!" he said, and then, with outstretched arms, he advanced to where she stood; and she, raising her eyes, in which the tears still glistened, looked into his face as he pressed her close to his broad bosom, to his heart which was beating so wildly, and then their lips met in one mad, passionate kiss.

The next moment he led her within.

The following morning Jack informed his lordship that he regretted having to return to town, but he had received letters which desired his immediate presence at the Temple.

Netta was not there when he went, and so he told Gerlie to say good-bye to her for him, she the while looking up to him with wistful eyes, in which the tears glistened, for she had read his secret; but he merely kissed her with, maybe, a little more tenderness. And she, as her mother had done, said, "Poor Jack!" and then she watched from her place at the window until the trap in which he drove to the station had passed from sight. "My poor darling!" the only words she expressed when she could see him no more.

Between her and Netta a coldness had arisen, for Gerlie felt she could never forgive her treatment of her cousin; and, although it was no secret now—her engagement to Lord Gothard—between the two girls the subject was seldom alluded to.

Mrs. Sugden had reluctantly given her consent, she could not well refuse, feeling as she did what an advantageous match it was for Netta herself, and, as she said, they were so poor at Gunn's Corner; and, if she did not retrieve their fortunes by marriage, there was no chance of Josephine or Lottie doing so.

"And to be poor, dear auntie, is so hateful!" and she shuddered when she recalled the shifts they had had to make in the old days after her father's death.

"But, my dear, Jack is not poor!"

There was a tone of reproach in Mrs. Sugden's voice which did not escape Netta, and for a moment there was a struggle in her breast between the love she had for her cousin and the wealth which, as Lady Gothard, she would enjoy. But it was only momentary. The next minute she sat down and wrote to her mother that she was the affianced wife of his lordship.

It was six weeks now since they first came to Castle Towers, and before their return home it was arranged the next time Netta entered within its walls to do so as its mistress.

In some unaccountable way it even had reached Mrs. Frost's ears, who congratulated Mrs. Sugden, hoping they would be happy; but she always feared where there was such a disparity in years.

And then the last night arrived, and Lord Gothard monopolised Netta. The other guests had left, and he told her how miserable it would be—all that was so beautiful now—when she was gone.

"And will you miss me, little one?" he asked.

They were standing on the broad terrace which ran by the drawing-room windows, now bathed in the moonlight, making everything clear as day on the green of the park beyond, and Netta started. She was so deep in thought, half sad, half glad, as her eyes roamed over that wide expanse, where the great trees spread out their mighty arms, and in one big dark belt stood far in the distance.

"You quite frightened me," she said. "Of

course, I shall miss you. You have been very kind, Lord Gothard."

"Am I always to be Lord Gothard? You promised to call me Arthur."

"There was an impatience in his tone."

"I am so sorry," Nettie answered. "Arthur I meant, but—" and she stopped.

"You mean I am so much older."

He had finished the sentence for her; but she saw his annoyance, and denied it was that she intended to say.

"No, no; but our engagement is so recent," she added.

"And I have as yet given you no ring," and taking a small morocco case from his pocket he opened it, the gems it contained sparkling in the moonlight.

"Oh! how lovely!" she cried, the diamonds blazing before her, set on either side with a ruby; and then, taking it from the case he placed it on her finger, she like a child kissing him in return.

They went in then, it was growing late, and Mrs. Sugden had arranged that they should leave by an early train on the following day.

Gertie was not well, having caught a severe cold, which made her the more anxious to be at home; and when Lord Gothard bid them good-bye it was some moments he held the sick girl's hand, looking strangely into her face, as though it recalled to his mind some past remembrance; and then, as the carriage rolled from his door, he stood watching until the last sounds of its wheels were lost in the distance.

He would have moved away then, when he became aware he was not alone, Mrs. Frost coming forward as he turned towards the library.

"Did you wish to see me, my lord?" she said.

"I did not send for you, Mrs. Frost."

"I beg your lordship's pardon; but I understood from James that it was so," and she was about to retrace her steps when Lord Gothard said,—

"I shall not remain at Castle Towers after this week, Mrs. Frost. What a sad thing for that poor little girl," he added, after a few moments. "It has made me feel quite unhappy."

"The little cripple," Mrs. Frost answered. "Yes, it is sad; and such a sweet face, too; but she has been like that from her birth."

"Mrs. Sugden has told you all about it, I see," and his lordship smiled, thinking how rapidly women entered into confidences; but on raising his eyes he was surprised to see his housekeeper's face red like a peony, the while she solemnly turned the subject to Miss Merivale. She had never seen anyone so beautiful, she said; but Lord Gothard considering she was only attempting to discover a secret he did not intend (little knowing that it had already been) to be the subject of the servants' hall, after making some brief remark dismissed her, saying he was going to dine out, and should not return until late in the evening.

"There's some mystery about that woman I would give half my estate to find out," he soliloquised, when the door closed behind her. And then, after a short while, he went out into the bright sunshine, thinking, thinking, and the birds singing their glad songs overhead.

CHAPTER VI.

On their return to town little was thought of but the wedding, which had been fixed for the last week in October, so that after spending the honeymoon on the Continent they could return to spend Christmas at Castle Towers.

Jack had taken chambers in the Temple, telling his mother he found doing so more convenient, and thus taking the one bright spot from the life of the little invalid.

But she never repined, a sad, weary look alone coming to her face when the accustomed hour drew near that he had been used to return, bringing light and gladness with him.

But it was so seldom now he came, and when

he did he seemed so different to Jack of old that his coming brought only sorrow to her, knowing as she did what had wrought the change.

Mrs. Sugden could not fail to see that the sweet face was growing thinner day by day, and a nasty cough, which she had had when at Lord Gothard's, clung to her still.

"Take her out of England altogether, where she will escape our trying winter," was the doctor's advice; but Mrs. Sugden felt the doing so just now was an impossibility.

"As soon as her cousin's wedding is over I will take her abroad," she said. "But she is so young that she may grow over any tendency to consumption that is likely."

But Dr. Patterson said nothing, only shaking his head, and mentally averring afterwards there was not an insurance office in London would insure her life, notwithstanding her youth.

October had come in bright and golden, turning to yellow and red the leaves which still lingered on the trees in the parks, where the hot summer had left the grass withered and worn, and Nettie, after a flying visit to Gann's Corner, had returned to town for the purpose of interviewing dressmakers and milliners, and doing what was required on her part towards the completion of the preparations for her approaching nuptials.

Lord Gothard had made many handsome presents to his bride-elect, placing in Mrs. Sugden's hands a cheque for five hundred pounds towards her trousseau.

"Not a word," he said, when that lady would have remonstrated. "I am not a young man, you know. I have been married before and understand something about these matters."

So that although Nettie neither knew nor asked where the money came from she was so liberally supplied that she thought to gladden the hearts of those at home by promising Josephine and Little they should be her bridesmaids, she supplying the dresses.

"My dear, I do indeed trust you may be happy," Mrs. Sugden said when they were together one evening in the Berkeley-street drawing-room, discussing the while Gertie was asleep, the event which was so shortly to take place. "But Lord Gothard's tastes at his time of life must be so different to yours. However, money goes a long way, there is no doubt, in insuring happiness which might not otherwise exist."

"I dare say we shall agree as well as most people," Nettie replied, the while she twisted and turned around her finger the betrothal ring his lordship had given her, until the stones flashed in the gaslight.

"Nettie, who gave you that?" and Mrs. Sugden caught hold of the girl's white hand, in the impulse of the moment drawing the jewel from her finger.

"Lord Gothard," was the reply; "when we were at Castle Towers."

But her aunt was prying no heed to her answer; she was intently studying the ring in question, on the inside of which was engraved beneath where the stones sparkled, Ever Yours. But the workmanship was foreign, notwithstanding that the motto was English.

"Why did you not show me this before, Nettie?"

"I did not think to do so, supposing you had seen it. But what is there particular about it?" she asked.

Mrs. Sugden said no more, only retaining the ring, for Gertie had awoken. But strange thoughts filled her mind when, later on, she was alone, and before retiring to rest she had written, desiring that Lord Gothard would call the following day.

But although she anxiously awaited his coming, the weary hours passed without his lordship putting in an appearance, and it was not until late in the afternoon that a telegram arrived for Nettie, stating that he had been called away suddenly.

He had telegraphed from the country, therefore he had not received Mrs. Sugden's letter, so she had to remain satisfied until his return. But before that occurred Gertie's illness had assumed

a more serious aspect, that everything in connection with the wedding was, for the time, forgotten; and when he did come, a week previous to the one appointed, she could tell him no more than that it would have to be postponed.

It was three weeks now since Gertie had come downstairs, and day by day she was growing weaker, until her life hung but on a thread.

Mrs. Sugden seldom left her now, for she could not bear that she should be away. The only happiness she had was to let her hand rest in hers; and then a glad light would come to her eyes when Jack came to her, as he used to do before that change came to break her heart.

"Something tells me you will be happy when I am gone, dear," she said, when one evening he was sitting by her side. "It is all I have a wish to see before I die, and then I shall be so glad to go!"

"Don't talk like that, Gertie. You don't think how hard it is for me to part with you, little sister!" was his answer, but she almost winced beneath the touch of his hand on her golden hair, the while even then she could not bring her lips to undecieve him.

"Sister, little sister," she repeated. "Yes, always think of me as that, dear. We have been happy together, have we not?" she asked. "And I think you will miss me a little, Jack, and sometimes wish you had her with you still—the poor cripple who loved you so fondly!"

But Jack could not answer, his big heart breaking with the great sorrow that unmanned him; and then she fell into a peaceful sleep, and Mrs. Sugden led him from the room.

It was but the precursor of that from which there was no awakening, for when she reopened her eyes and saw he was not by her side they wandered restlessly around the room, and "Jack, Nettie," was all she said, when Mrs. Sugden asked who it was she wanted.

They came in shortly after that, advancing together to her bedside. They knew her time was drawing short, for her breathing had become painfully hard, but when asked if she was suffering, she only answered with a gentle smile, and bade them kiss her.

"It is good-bye," she said, and then taking a hand of each she placed them together, the words "It is my wish," the last she uttered.

But even death took her gently in its arms, bearing her away from them in a quiet slumber, not until the shadow he had left behind rested on her beloved features convincing them that her spirit had flown.

Tasy moved aside then, restraining the sobs which told how hard it was to leave her there, the while they drew down the blinds where the bright sun entered, gliding to the last her yellow hair with his setting rays.

Lord Gothard was the first to offer his condolences, considering the letter he had received was in consequence of the sad event.

"I could not get here before, Mrs. Sugden," he said, "having been unexpectedly called to the North."

"It was not in reference to our darling's illness that I was so anxious to see you, Lord Gothard. Her living or dying could little affect you," and she looked directly towards him; "was there not some weightier reason for my desiring to see you? It was in reference to this ring which you gave my niece that I wished to speak with you. I think I have seen it before!"

"I can scarcely suppose such to be the case," his lordship answered, taking it from her, and she studying him the while.

But there was little to be drawn from the expression of his countenance, which scarcely changed, his hand alone slightly trembling when he took the jewel.

"It was made several years since by a foreign jeweller, the stones, which are of great value, having belonged to my mother, and when admiring one ring in particular displayed with others in a window in Brussels, I—directions were given that these stones should be similarly mounted."

His hesitation was not unnoticed by his listener, who answered,—

"And it has been in your possession ever since!"

"It is a lady's ring," was his lordship's reply. "But why, Mrs. Sugden, should you have an idea that you recognise it?"

"I will tell you, Lord Gothard. Eighteen years since—I had been married but three years then—I one afternoon was with my little son, just re-entering the house, having alighted from the carriage in which we had been driving round the park, when a middle-aged woman, neatly dressed, advanced towards me.

"You are Mrs. Sugden, are you not?" she asked, and on my answering in the affirmative, she asked me if I would return with her to see a lady who lived in her drawing-room, a Mrs. Merton.

"Mrs. Merton!" I answered, "I know no one of that name."

"But she knows you," the woman replied, "and in any case, ma'am, if I were you I should go, for I don't think she is long for this world."

"I told her to come in, then, while she was waiting in the hall, and nurse with baby had gone upstairs. I proceeded to my husband's library to consult him in the matter.

"Return with her in the carriage, dear," he said. "You will be perfectly safe, and she must know something, or would not have addressed you by name."

"Unless she learnt it from the servants."

"That is scarcely likely," he smiled.

"I seemed dubious, but after a while I agreed. It was growing late, so I gave orders that the woman should be taken to the servants' hall, where she was to have refreshment, and after dinner I would accompany her. I hope I am not wearying you, Lord Gothard?"

"But far from being weary," he assured her. He was deeply interested, being anxious to learn in what way this story affected the possession of the ring in question.

"It was to some street in Piccadilly we were driven," Mrs. Sugden continued, "the door being opened by a girl of eighteen. 'She had run down,' she said, 'when she had heard the knock, for Mrs. Merton was getting terribly excited, and the servant was at the top of the house.'

"You are very kind, Miss Flavell," the woman answered. "And then she asked me to follow her upstairs."

"The room into which I was led was a small bedroom on the first floor, off the drawing-room. It was only lighted by a night lamp, the gas having been turned almost out. But the voice which came from the bed caused me to start, asking in anxious tones, if Mrs. Sugden had come."

"Yes, yes, dear," Miss Flavell said; at the same time she turned up the gas, leading me then to where the invalid lay.

"She was little more than a girl, no older than Miss Flavell herself; but she was a woman in sorrow—sorrow which had taken all the fun and sparkle from her velvety eyes, leaving them saddened and weary, with the thick, dark fringes drooping over them."

"You have come, Helen! I thought you would," and then she held out a little white hand, so transparent that I almost feared to touch it, the while a look of happiness for a moment passed over her face.

"Myra, my darling! why did you not send me before?" I asked, throwing myself on my knees beside her. And then for the first time I saw a tiny, wee face beside her own."

Mrs. Sugden paused for a moment, the while a strange, anxious look had settled on his lordship's features, giving to them the appearance of having grown suddenly worn and aged.

"Yes; will you take her, Helen?" she asked, following my gaze to where the infant was calmly sleeping. "I would not have her go now, only I know I am dying."

"But where is your husband, Myra?" I asked, for when she left home, as she had done a year before, the rent word she was married.

"She scarcely knew how to answer. I could see the love in her eyes which was battling with the duty she owed her child, and then the tears coursed each other down her cheeks."

"It was no marriage, dear," she answered; "but don't shrink from me," for she saw the expression of horror which passed over my face.

"For in the sight of Heaven I was—I am his wife."

"She then took from under her pillow a card-case, on which was her name and that of Arthur Disney.

"I have it here," Mrs. Sugden said, but Lord Gothard had no wish to see it, he said, when she would have handed it to him. He did not see in what way her narrative affected him.

She made no remark, only refolding the paper as she continued,—

"After that she asked Miss Flavell to give her a packet which was lying on the dressing-table. On receiving it from her hands she opened it before me."

"His presents, Helen," she said. "See, I have packed them all together. Will you see that they are sent to the address I have put outside? He said it would always find him."

"I took them according to her wish, putting them all together again, for she had been looking at each with streaming eyes, and kissing one or two which recalled, maybe, a happy moment. But they were links in the past to which she clung, not for their intrinsic worth, but the memories they brought back, and then she pushed them from her, when something rolled from their midst."

"It was this!" and Mrs. Sugden held up the ring.

It was the one his lordship had given her niece.

But Mrs. Sugden made no comment on that then; she only continued her story, he the while listening, looking as though something stronger than curiosity made him anxious to know the end.

"I could not stay longer then, so telling her I would be with her in the morning, when I would take back my little niece, I left."

"The following morning I was true to my word; but I was too late, my darling had passed away in the night, so I came back with a heavy heart and my living legacy."

"I must think it out, it seems so strange." It was his lordship who spoke. "Don't tell me any more now, Mrs. Sugden. I—I don't feel—up to it," he blurted out at last. "Let me come to-morrow," and then he rose from his chair.

For a second he held her hand, and, then, when she moved to ring the bell, she could hear him tottering down the stairs, and ten years taken from his life.

CHAPTER VII.

In the chamber of death the last offices had been performed for the lifeless girl in the narrow bed provided her, looking even more lovely than when, but a few months since, she had reclined upon the couch in the drawing-room beneath.

Like one in a peaceful slumber she lay, the deep fringe of her beautiful closed eyes resting on her waxen cheek, coloured but by the faintest tinge of pink, the while her lips were as though the artist's brush had touched them with carnation; and flowers, such as she had so fondly loved, were placed on her still bosom, exhalting their rich perfume around, and mingling with the long golden tresses which fell over her shoulders.

Jack had crept in to have a last look of the beloved face before the coffin-lid closed it from him and all for ever. He had brought with him choice flowers, his last tribute to his darling; and then he fell on his knees beside where she lay, his grief bursting forth afresh when he recalled to his mind how dear he had been to her. Could anyone love him as she had done, her happiness hanging on the sound of his footfall, her very life becoming glad in her affliction when he was near?

It was all over now; the one most faithful to him was gone. His love had proved false to her vows, and she who would have clung to him against the world was dead.

How long he had been there he could not tell, so absorbed was he in his reflections, the while, with his head buried in his hands, he knelt beside the lifeless clay.

But the gentle rustle of a woman's dress told him he was not alone, and rising slowly he saw his mother standing beside him.

"I had no idea you were here, Jack. Our darling, does she not look beautiful?" And she turned to where the dead girl lay, speaking in those subdued tones which people use in the presence of death, as though fearful to awaken the quiet sleeper.

He moved away then, placing the flowers he had brought close to her waxen fingers.

"They are these she loved best in life, mother."

But Mrs. Sugden made no reply, only laying her hand gently on his shoulder.

"Do you know what killed her, Jack?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand, mother," he answered. "Did not Dr. Patterson say?"

"Dr. Patterson? No doctor could have cured her. She died, Jack, her heart broken for love of you."

He looked up then; and for the first time he learnt that the little girl who had loved him with such devoted affection, she who had grown up with him under the same roof, looking up to him as a superior being, whose every wish was her law, was not his mother's child.

"And she knew?" he asked, a faltering in his voice, "the while I was kept in ignorance. It might have been so different, mother!"

But Mrs. Sugden apparently did not notice the reproach in his tone.

"It was her wish, poor darling!" she said, "in consequence of her affliction; feeling, had you known the relationship in which you stood to each other, you might have loved her less. The while had you evinced a stronger affection she could never have been more to you than little sister, while, in reality, she was your cousin."

He said no more, the while he gazed fondly on the still, white face, a thousand recollections recalling themselves to his mind. And then he stooped to impress his first lover's kiss on the cold lips, feeling in that moment, when his eyes were opened, it was something more than the love of a brother which had so entwined her round his heart.

Another remembrance then surged through his brain—the promise half given to her dying wish, and Netta as far from him as the dead girl lying there in her waxen beauty.

"And she wished me to wed Netta?"

"I know," Mrs. Sugden replied, and she would have said more; when a knock and ring attracted her attention she was aware that Lord Gothard had kept his word, when, replacing the coffin-lid, she linked her arm within that of her son and led him from the room, telling him to join Netta, as she wanted to speak privately to his lordship.

A few moments later, and she entered the library where he had been shown, he rising and extending his hand on her approach.

"I have kept my appointment," he said, and then he resumed his seat, the while Mrs. Sugden thought how aged he had become in those few hours intervening since their last interview.

"And you have a wish to hear the remainder of my story?"

He did not answer for a short time, his features working nervously, the while he twitched unconsciously at his watch chain, and then evading her question.

"And you suppose the ring I gave your niece to be the same as that which was so many years ago returned with other trifles to Arthur Disney?" he said.

"Scarcely a supposition, my lord," was her reply; "as it is most unlikely there were two of the same, exact in every particular. But in case of doubt, Miss Flavell would, I feel sure, be enabled to recognise it; for long ago though it was, it was she who recovered it when it had fallen from the packet, remarking at the time on its beauty and uncommon setting."

"And maybe Miss Flavell should be married or dead. So many events take place in a few years even, Mrs. Sugden, and eighteen is a long

time to look back on and to carry one's memory with them."

"She has been married," was Mrs. Sugden's reply, the while she kept her eyes fixed on her listener, adding, "and widowed also."

"You have seen her, then?"

There was an uneasy expression on his lordship's face which did not escape the other's notice.

"I have," she answered. "It was but a few weeks ago; but at the time, although there was a something familiar in her features, I failed to recognise her, for, as you have said, my lord, time plays and havoc with old-remembered faces. But a something in her manner impressed me. Her memory was not so faulty but that she could call to mind the event."

"However, I heard what she confided to me, feeling my lips were sealed, on account of having promised that the little she had told me should go no further; and had it not been for your engagement to my niece, Lord Gothard, I should not have raked up the ashes of the dead, the wrong done to my sister being less than that you did the woman whom the world regarded as your wife!"

"Your sister!" his lordship ejaculated. "Mrs. Sugden, either you or I must be dreaming!" but his face was very white, and the nervous twitching of his features was beyond his control.

"It is no dream, although at one time I wished it had been. The man who married Myra Morton, my sister, was no other than Arthur Disney Gothard, then an Honourable; not until he succeeded to the title, which he did shortly afterwards, going through the form of marriage with a lady for whom he could scarcely have had any affection, further than being thankful thus to secure sufficient to save Castle Towers from the Jews!"

"And you believe me to be the man you thus stigmatised?"

He had arisen from his seat then, the while a sudden resolve had formed in his mind.

"I only ask justice, Mrs. Sugden," he continued. "I do not deny the great wrong which was done your sister, but it was not done by me, and when I contracted the unfortunate marriage which I did I was a free man."

"I had taken a vow never to divulge that into which my name was dragged, and through which I have unfortunately suffered; but he to whom I gave that promise has gone to answer for the sin he associated me with; and to clear my honour, my title, I feel I am bound to state facts of which your informant, my housekeeper, was ignorant."

"My father, you must know, had but two sons—myself and my brother—and we were twins; but, strange to say, with the exception of the intensity of affection we had one for the other, there was little else in common between us—Harold, who was the elder, being a wild, high-spirited boy, while I, it may be from the fact of being more physically weak, was of a quiet, home-loving disposition; but Harold was my father's favourite, and when our mother died, all his love was centred in his eldest son."

"It was then he came to me one day, for he had been summoned home from the Continent."

"I am in an awful fix, Arthur!" he said. "I have been married!"

"Married!" he ejaculated, "and to whom?"

"Oh! a nice little thing enough; but what could have induced me to make such a fool of myself I can't think!" and then he went on to tell me he had been married in my name. "Well," he said, "I dropped the Harold, that was all."

"Yes, he had omitted that name, the only one which made a difference in our identity. But it is of no consequence," he assured me, "for the girl is quite satisfied that it was no marriage; and we have had a very jolly time of it, and now she is gone back to her friends."

"But she is sure to follow you up, Harold," I said, "and with my name, too. It will be rather awkward."

"Not a bit of it, my dear fellow," he laughed. "And, even so, what knowledge have you of Arthur Disney?"

"Did you not add Gothard?" I asked.

"But he said nothing, the while he regarded me as though I was a fool, and I looked on him as a villain. But the blind love with which I invested him led me to believe, after awhile, that that which had at first given such a shock to my sense of honour was really, in a wordy point of view, no more than an escapade on the part of each, repented of and forgotten equally by both."

"To give a colour to the life with which he had fathered me, he had given the address of an old servant who had formerly lived in our service, and from that source I one day received a parcel containing several trinkets, but not a word to tell by whom they were sent."

"My presents, I declare!" he said, when I showed him the contents. "I gave her credit for more sense. Keep them, my boy, they are useless to me. I would rather not see them."

"And, in fact, I could see he did not want to look at them, that being the only occasion on which I saw him express any feeling in the matter until his death."

"Did he think then?" Mrs. Sugden asked.

"Yes; it was the last time, when holding my hand to his, he mentioned it."

"Don't let father ever know my secret, Arthur," he said; "but it was a parcel of lies I told you and her—you know who I mean, for I had almost forgotten the circumstances. 'Poor little girl, she is my wife, and if by chance you ever come across her'—But what it was he would have said died on his lips."

"And, of course, you never thought further, when there was so little chance of discovery?"

"To me, now he was gone, it was a matter of little importance, and the little I did think was soon driven from my mind by other events following so quickly on—my father's death, which occurred shortly after, and then the unsatisfactory state of his affairs, and my unhappy marriage. But that is all passed now, and there remains but one sacrifice I can make which will in any way atone for my brother's wrongs. I am an old man, Mrs. Sugden, but my heart is not dead, and when I tell you I resign all pretensions to the hand of Netta in favour of your son, I know well how fondly it beats for her."

She would have spoken then, but he held up his hand.

"I am not blind, nor shall she lose, my darling, by the exchange; for though she loves Jack fondly as he loves her, she shall still have Castle Towers."

"Has Castle Towers no heir, then?" Mrs. Sugden asked.

Lord Gothard looked up.

"I forgot," he said, "Harold's child!" and a sense of disappointment passed over his features.

But Mrs. Sugden arose from her seat, asking him to follow her from the room.

He went then up the soft carpeted stairs, where the autumn sun came to them through the richly-stained glass, to where his guide led him along a wide corridor, until they reached a door at the further end.

Turning the handle softly they entered. It was so silent, so still, that he felt he was in the presence of death; and when Mrs. Sugden removed the coffin-lid, and he saw the face of the dead girl, he knew then what it was she would have told him, and when she replaced it, "Harold's child!" were the words which involuntarily escaped his lips.

CHAPTER VIII.

AND so it was that Harold's child was taken to Devon and there laid to rest, but not in the family vault, as Lord Gothard would have willed it, but beneath a leafy beech bending its branches low over her grave, close by the church wall.

"We shall feel more as though she was with us," Jack had said, for it was arranged that her last wish should be carried out—his union with Netta, although some time had elapsed before he could entirely forget how quickly she had thrown him over for a richer lover. But six months had passed since then.

"Not that I could have married Lord Gothard when it came to the point," Netta told him, "for I never loved anyone save your own dear self, Jack."

"Then it was Castle Towers you were so deeply enamoured of, you mercenary little lady!"

"Not exactly mercenary, Jack. But, oh! if you had known the pinching and screwing at Gann's Corner we had to make two ends meet," and she shivered at the recollection, "and I thought how glad mamma would be—for you know I could have done so much for them all; and then Lord Gothard, he was so good. But I shall never part with his ring as long as I live. Josephine declared it was the talisman which led to their good fortune; and, by-the-bye, I suppose we must ask her and Lottie to the Towers!"

"Why not?" Jack asked, "or are you still in fear of an unsightly pin displaying itself amid the folds of her black dress?"

"I am afraid of nothing of the kind. One thing, she does not wear black now, and another, Josephine is no longer the plain awkward Josephine of Gann's Corner. But here comes his lordship."

(Continued on page 203)

TRIED AND TRUE

—10—

As the wind hauled fair for Cuba, fold after fold of canvas was loosened and sheeted home, spreading broad and full from truck to deck, until the stately ship bore the appearance of some enormous white cloud sweeping over the bosom of the ocean.

About her curved prow, roaring through the water, the bright sunshine wore myriad rainbows in the leaping spray, and lighted up like silver spangles the ganzy wings of hundreds of flying-fish darting through the air around the vessel.

Aft, at the helm, with her husband, stood the captain's pretty wife, Emily, a young woman of twenty-five, with brown eyes and smooth chestnut hair. The captain, a sturdy young fellow of thirty, was teaching her to steer.

At her playful request he often showed her how to thus guide the craft, so that she was now become quite skilful in the handling of the wheel.

"Ay," he was saying in reply to a remark she made, "you steer so well that, if all the *Ses Nymphs*' men were sick, I could safely put you at the helm."

"Are you not then fortunate in having brought me to sea with you?" inquired Emily, laughing. "I love the sea, and am glad to find myself so useful."

"So far," he answered, "you have seen only the bright side. Suffering or danger would make you wish you had stayed at home."

And, as he spoke, he looked down at her white, slender throat and frail, sylph-like form.

She became serious and thoughtful.

"It is true I am not very strong," she said, and then, with a slight shudder, she added: "I hope we will have no hardship or peril of any kind. It is bad enough to have to hold on to the side of one's berth to keep from falling out when the ship is rolling, without meeting with any worse danger!"

She said this pleasantly; but, although he did not show it, her remark gave her partner some inward dissatisfaction.

"Surely," he thought, "this is not like the speech of the model sort of woman we often read about, who would say, 'I will brave any hardship for the sake of being with my husband!' I wish she had said that to me instead of what she did. I fear my pretty wife is a fair-weather craft, whom trouble or danger might drive from my side; but, then, after all, I must remember she is delicate, and has had but few trials."

On that very day a merchant barque, called the *Pole Star*, from Rio Janeiro for London, was spoken, and her captain coming aboard informed

Hugh that he was chased by pirates three days before, off the coast of Cuba; for at this period (1820) the shores and waters of the West India Islands were infested with swarms of freebooters, who often attacked and plundered passing vessels.

"Oh, Hugh!" cried Emily, pale with alarm, "now that we are sure there are pirates near us I feel very much afraid. Let us put off going to Cuba for the present. We can go to the Bermudas and wait until the sloop-of-war there, which you said was going to cruise off the West Indies, is ready to sail."

"No, she has probably sailed before now. Besides, the owners of this ship want their cargo at a certain time, and as I promised, if possible, to bring it to them at that time, I must not break my word. Of course, the risk from pirates or shipwreck was understood, but that was not to keep me back. After all, we may see no sign of a pirate," he added, soothingly; then, deeply touched by the look of terror on the face of his gentle wife, he continued: "I think it best you should not be exposed to any risk. Here is the barque *Pole Star* bound for London. I will transfer you aboard of her, if you will go."

"No," she promptly answered. "I will stay with you."

Her husband could not persuade her to leave him, and soon, the Skipper of the *Pole Star* having departed, the *Sea Nymph* was kept on her course.

Hugh was sorry his wife had not taken a home passage aboard the other craft. Her refusal, he believed, was owing to her having concluded that there would, after all, be no danger. Should pirates really be encountered, he dreaded the effect upon the delicate nerves of his fair consort, who, he feared, might lose her reason, or even expire from sheer terror.

Sure enough, three days later, the rays of the rising sun, partly dispersing a mist that hung over the sea, showed four low, suspicious schooners, with black hulls, and with bows as sharp as sword-fish, swiftly cleaving the golden-yellow waves, under clouds of canvas, towards the *Sea Nymph*. One of these vessels was really ahead, another astern, and the two others were coming up from windward and leeward, the first mentioned and the latter being, of course, "close-hauled." They were still about three miles off, and by crowding additional canvas Hugh hoped he might manage to escape. In fact, he had nearly passed the one off the lee bow when bang! went a gun, and a shot crashed against the fore-topmast aloft. Slowly and gracefully the spar, with its broad canvas attached, inclined to leeward, and then away it went rattling down by the run alongside.

"Hi-yah! hi-yah! Hooray!" yelled the pirates, as their sharp-pointed craft came on cutting the water like a knife.

Out on the booms and in the rigging they swarmed, with caps pushed back from their dusky faces, the long daggers and pistols in their sashes plainly revealed.

"We will at least make a good fight before they take us," said Hugh to his crew, consisting of fifteen sailors. "Out with the guns!"

Three, three in number, were run out, and fired again and again, but without much effect, while so thick and fast were the shot from the pirate craft, as the four vessels came on to ham in the crippled *Sea Nymph*, that several of Hugh's men were soon killed.

Meanwhile nothing could exceed the captain's surprise at the conduct of his wife, now that the expected peril was really come.

Instead of dropping from terror, as he had thought she would do, Emily, although very pale, was resolute and composed.

Hugh had requested her to stay in the cabin, but she had bravely ventured up the companion-way, from which she watched her husband, who, with sleeves rolled up and face begrimed with powder, was assisting his few men to work the guns.

The fog, which, as stated, had partly cleared, was again thickening, so that finally only the booms and foremasts of the enemy could be seen. Now, however, they were not more than half a league off, and by some skilful shots Hugh

succeeded in crippling two of them, by bringing down the fore-topmast yard of one and the fore-topmast of another.

But, even while he joined in the cheers of his little party, a spiteful shot struck him slantingly in the side, and he fell bleeding to the deck.

In a moment Emily was kneeling by him, giving him water.

"Take him into the cabin!" she then ordered in a clear voice.

He was carried there, and laid on a lounge, his wife carefully arranging a pillow under his head.

There was a good doctor aboard, and while he was dressing the wound Emily bathed the sufferer's forehead, and gave him cooling drinks.

"Would not he be more comfortable in his berth?" she inquired.

"He must not be moved at present," was the doctor's answer. "It would be his death to move him now."

Tears came to the young woman's eyes, her lips quivered.

"Don't worry, Emily," said Hugh, in a faint voice.

Knowing it distressed him to witness her grief, she wiped away her tears. Then she kissed him, and continued to bathe his head.

Above, the booming of guns and the howling of shot became every moment nearer and louder. A minute later, nine men—all that were left of the young captain's crew—rushed into the cabin.

"It's all up with us," said one, lifting his cap. "The pirates'll soon be aboard of us; but the fog has thickened, so that we may escape in one of the boats. We can put the captain in the boat, ma'am," he added, addressing Emily.

"No; it would kill him to move him," spoke up the doctor. "But you had better go," he added, turning to the young wife.

"What! leave my husband!" she said.

"You can do him no good, for the pirates will not spare you. The rescues will show no quarter either to man or woman. All that can be done for him has been done, and—"

Ere the doctor could conclude, a shot came whizzing through the cabin window, severely wounding both of his legs above the knees.

"Come, ma'am, come!" cried the sailor who had previously spoken.

"I will not leave my husband," was Emily's answer.

Unable to persuade her to go, all the seamen except one, who declared he would not desert a craft that a woman "stuck to," made for the boat, assisting the groaning doctor into it, after which, screened by the smoke and fog, they pulled away from the imperilled ship.

The solitary sailor took his place at the wheel. Then he noticed that there was a slight change of wind, causing the nearest pirate to tack so as to "fetch" the *Sea Nymph*. Through the drapery of fog he could dimly see the vessel's foreyards swing round.

"Ma'am," he called at the companion way, "I think if I could brace the yards a little we might have just a chance of slipping off and showing our heels to these human sharks; but it needs some one at the wheel while I do the bracing, for the wind has freshened."

"I will take the wheel," answered Emily, quickly, "and try to save my husband."

She ran on deck, and the sailor having shown her the course to steer, she seized the wheel. Then the tar hurried to brace the yards, for the shots were now coming very fast, and he was anxious to relieve Emily from her perilous position as soon as possible. A few vigorous pulls on the lee braces brought the yards to the required slant; but as the man was about to take the wheel again, a heavy splinter, knocked from the rail by a shot, struck him on the temple, laying him dead at the young wife's feet.

"Now, Heaven help me," cried the brave woman, "to steer aright, and save my noble Hugh!"

With firm hands she worked the helm; with steady eyes she watched the ship's head, to see that it did not swerve; and as the craft went roaring on through the white foam toward the

space between the pirate vessels, by means of which she hoped to escape her enemies, a gleam of joy lighted her face.

A fine type of womanly courage and fortitude was she, standing there with her beautiful chestnut tresses blown out from her head like streamers, and not a tremor shaking her slender figure, although the shot whizzed and whirled and screamed all about her, some of them even grazing her hair.

In that moment she heeded not the flying shot—thought nothing of her own peril; but her eyes were brighter than the flashing death-gleams that lighted the fog all around her, for every thought, with the whole strength of her soul, was concentrated on that one idea—that one unshaken resolution to save the life of her wounded husband.

On went the ship, and at last she passed through the open space between the pirate vessels, thus leaving the latter in pursuit astern.

Two of them, as stated, were crippled, but the others gained on the *Sea Nymph*, until, by keeping off a little, Emily managed to maintain her distance from them.

Thus pursued and pursued had proceeded a league, when all at once the young woman beheld a dark object—some kind of craft—ahead of her.

Her heart sank. Was it possible that one of the pirate vessels had contrived to double on her in the fog?

A moment later she saw the lofty masts of the vessel looming up; then she saw open port-holes—a double row—with the muzzles of the guns showing through them, and she beheld a marine, with musket at support, walking the gangway!

A cry of joy escaped her, for the vessel was a man-of-war, and her husband was saved!

"Please to put your wheel hard down!" sang out an officer from the vessel's quarterdeck; and Emily promptly did as requested.

The ship swung up into the wind, and a cutter, containing a surgeon and a crew, with the seamen who had deserted the *Sea Nymph*, and were afterwards picked up by this sloop-of-war, came alongside. Emily was relieved at the wheel, and the surgeon accompanied her into the cabin.

Hugh feebly raised his head. "We are not captured, then?" he said to his wife.

"No. I have saved you!" she answered. "I steered away from the pirates, and now we are close to the man-of-war. I learn it is the same one you spoke of, which was lately at the Bermudas."

The war-craft now chased the pirates, but the latter contrived to escape in the fog. Meanwhile the crew which had been sent to the *Sea Nymph* proceeded to repair her damaged foremast, and she was soon in proper condition to keep up with the sloop-of-war, which was headed for the port of Havana, Cuba, where both vessels arrived a week later.

Under the surgeon's skilful treatment and that of the captain's wife the young man in a fortnight was able to leave the cabin, after which he shipped a new crew, procured his cargo, and eventually took it home.

The brave conduct of his wife, whose character he had so misjudged, strengthened his love and esteem for her, and he now knew that a woman who shudders at the very thought of peril may show the utmost courage and fortitude when that peril really confronts her.

Not only had the noble behaviour of his fair partner saved her husband's life, but it also influenced the shipping firm, grateful for the preservation of their vessel—to allow Hugh a more liberal share of profits, thus enabling him in a few years to purchase the *Sea Nymph*, the name of which, in honour of his wife, he changed to the *Emily*.

[THE END.]

HALF the ships of the world are British. The best of them can be converted into ships of war in forty-eight hours.

HAD WE NEVER LOVED SO BLINDLY

-10-

CHAPTER XIII.

If Flora Trevanion had but known it, she had already taken one step along the road which would lead her ultimately to where the shadows were lurking—the darkest clouds gathering over her pretty young head.

Sir Basil released her hand, and she instantly turned round as if to go back to the carriage.

"Stay a moment," he said, with a smile; "you came to see the view, and you haven't looked at it. First look at those white sails shining out against the grey background of the island, then turn to the right and see Greylands standing out against the fir!"

"Lovely!" and then there was a long pause, as her eyes wandered from the gleaming waters of the Solent and the ships on its broad bosom, to the grave old Abbey where the monks of old had chanted their psalms, and prayed their long prayers till voice and heart were both at rest under the green sod. Some of the solemnity of the past seemed to hang over the building still, in spite of the flowers that made the gardens one blaze of colour, and the creepers that clung so readily to the rough grey stone of the walls, and some of the gloom of the past, or the present, hung over the proud possessor of all these wide acres which stretched over the sunny valley to the borders of the forest, over wood and hill, purple heath and golden corn—a gloom which seemed thoroughly out of place in a young unmarried man, whose struggles and difficulties were over before the prime of life had passed.

Flora gazed long at the beautiful landscape, the sparkling waters, the forest trees rising like green waves in a leafy ocean one behind the other, the stately home enshrined by the tall straight firs and feathery larches, and then she sighed.

"Why?" he asked her.

"It seems so hard that all this beautiful place cannot make you happy," she answered, looking up into his face with infinite pity shining out from under her thick lashes. How Jenny and Emily and half the world would have laughed at the idea of plying the rich baronet!

"No, it can't, and you are the only person who guesses it. I'm not made for a country-life. I fancy it doesn't come naturally to me to take an interest in cabbages and mangold-wurzel, to talk knowingly about fat pigs, or to settle which pasture is better for sheep. Sometimes I think I shall throw up the whole concern, establish Mitchell in the Abbey, and go abroad; and then people lecture me about my tenants, and tell me it is my duty to look after them, as if Mitchell didn't understand that sort of thing much better than I."

"Don't you think people grow to love their master?" said Flora, softly, "whilst they only fear a steward?"

"They may, but if I stayed till my hair grew white they wouldn't care a straw for me. I have no delusions about myself. I'm not the sort of fellow out of which a devoted tenantry could make an ideal landlord. Thornton, with his red face and jolly laugh, understands the sort of dodge, and would take their hearts by storm; but put up a dry stick in my place, pointing to a blighted fir which had lost nearly all its branches, "and they will learn to live as quite as much as me."

"I don't agree with you!" her heart softening as she guessed the bitterness in his; "the man who can risk his own life to save a stranger's, and without a moment's hesitation, is something better than a dry stick."

"The man who didn't would be a miserable cur—the man who did only won dislike for his pains."

"How can you say so!"

"I can say so," drawing himself up with a slight frown, "because it is the truth."

"It is not! I swear it isn't!" her eyes shining, her cheeks flushing. "Eustace thinks there is no one like you. Look how he stays on at the

Abbey, when he never wanted to be away from me before!"

"Stays on because I begged him not to desert me. Novelty counts for much in a boy's friendships. I possess that charm at least for the whole neighbourhood," with a bitter smile.

"Eustace is not like that. He has made you his hero, not because you are new, but because he appreciates you."

Sir Basil took off his hat, and made a low bow, whilst the dark mood seemed to fly at her words.

"And you, you say nothing of yourself," his eyes softening.

"I look upon you as the best friend that girl ever had. That isn't saying much," she added, hastily, as she saw the joy in his face, "for I've got so few."

"Thank heaven you have!" with all his heart.

"I wish to Heaven you had only one, that one myself."

"Very greedy of you," trying to speak lightly as she turned away, and began to descend the hill. "I don't see why you shouldn't be satisfied at being the best!"

"I ought," he confessed; "but somehow you make me more grasping than I ever was before."

"I don't like grasping people," still pursuing her way at a rapid pace; "whatever they want they must have, and they don't care a bit what they do to get it."

Sir Basil did not answer, and presently put her into the carriage without a word, leaving her to apologise to Eustace for their long delay, and to dilate on the beauties of the view. His silence lasted so long that he acted like a wet blanket on the others, and conversation flagged.

Becoming conscious of this, as they drew near to the Fir, he roused himself with a great effort, and spoke to Flora about something in the distance with so sweet a smile that her brother was quite reassured. A few minutes later, as they turned a corner in a leafy lane where the boughs met overhead, and made a delicious twilight of the splendour of a day in June, they came upon Mr. Philip Fane lounging on the bank in close conversation with a man who looked like a Londoner of the lower grade.

As he recognized Flora he shot an astonished glance at the lovely face, which made it crimson with displeasure, and looked back at his cousin with a peculiar smile that was almost a sneer. Sir Basil returned the look with a frown, and fixed his eyes on Fane's companion, who in his turn shrank into the hedge as far as he could in order to escape observation.

"What a queer looking fellow!" exclaimed Eustace, staring after the pair with sudden curiosity. "He looks like a sharper or a blackleg. I wonder where your cousin can have picked him up!"

"Philip has all sorts of strange acquaintances," said Sir Basil, thoughtfully, as if the man's face had given him subject for reflection. "You see he is a barrister-like myself, and practices at the Old Bailey brings you into contact with many rascals."

"I should have thought Mr. Fane was too much of a fine gentleman for that sort of thing," said Eustace, who from his enforced idleness exercised his powers of observation to an unusual extent on his fellow-creatures.

"Nobody knows what Philip's. He never is what he seems to be. He is always acting a part."

"You don't like him?"

"I am not enthusiastic about him," with a smile; "it is such a bore to be obliged to read a fellow backwards; to take it for granted if he says that he's glad that he must be sorry, and vice versa. If he says that he is going fishing I scarcely expect him to take his rod; and whatever he does I speculate about his motives."

"What a detestable man! I beg your pardon," and Flora blushed. "I forgot he was your cousin."

"He is not detestable, but it is my fault if you think him so. I had no right to expose his faults for the public benefit, but in this case, like Philip himself, I had a motive," and Sir

Basil's eyes rested meditatively on the fair young face just opposite to him.

"Very kind of you. You didn't want us to be taken in, and perhaps you knew as I did," with a knowing nod, "that Flo is easily gammoned." "Nothing of the sort!" she cried indignantly. "Nobody has ever taken me in, and nobody ever will."

"Don't be too sure," said Sir Basil, gravely. "Pride, we are told, goes before a fall."

She thought of his words in the after days, when pride was lowered, and faith was gone, but they did not make much impression on her now, as they drove in at the gate of the Fir, and her guardian came out on the steps to greet her.

"I was just going to send the police after you," he said, with his cheery laugh; "but you are home in time to save us both a scolding. How well Eustace is looking! He does credit to your care, Sir Basil; but when are we to expect him back?"

"Not so long as I can induce him to stay with me. What harm does it do to anyone his being there? and it does an infinity of good to me."

"I miss him rather," said Flora, gently, as she slipped her hand inside her guardian's arm.

"You know where to find him, Miss Trevanion, and surely, now that my aunt is staying with me you need not avoid us as if we had the plague!"

"No, if Eustace wants me I'll come. Good-bye, and thank you very much."

The words were to Sir Basil, but the last look was given to her brother.

CHAPTER XIV.

To say that Mrs. Willoughby was cross, to say that her two daughters were rabidly jealous, to say that life was made particularly uncomfortable for Flora Trevanion for the next few days would be no exaggeration, and yet the three ladies were obliged, to a certain extent, to hold their tongues.

Mr. Willoughby took upon himself the whole responsibility of the drive, so they were obliged to put up in comparative silence with the mortification of knowing that Flora was the only item of the party at the Fir necessary to Sir Basil's happiness when an invitation came to the Abbey, whilst nobody could have exactly complained of a gentleman coming in at a gate who seemed to have gone away quicker than he came.

Ponto knew of the tranquil quarter of an hour Mr. Frank Rivers had spent on the green award at Miss Trevanion's feet, but he was too well-bred a dog to betray a girl's confidence, and Jenny—the frate Jenny—had nothing but conjecture to go upon. But conjecture in her case was quite enough, if not far too much, and she raged inwardly at the thought that whilst she was playing with a stranger whom she did not care for, and who, worse still, was perfectly indifferent to herself, Flora, the interloper, was amusing herself with the friend of another girl's childhood.

Finding both the girls intent upon being disagreeable, and having no Eustace to fall back upon, poor Flora was very disconsolate. She was debarred from going to her favourite haunts in Greylands, so long as the Baronet was in possession; and not knowing what to do with herself, was quite glad to offer to carry a book to the Rectory, which Mrs. Willoughby had promised to lend the Winders.

In a silver-grey cotton, with a bunch of pink roses at her throat, and her large white hat doined in honour of the Rector's wife, she looked a pretty picture of an English girl in the pride of her youth and innocence. She put her foot on the ground, and carried her head with a high-bred air, that excited the admiration of one pair of insolent eyes, which chanced to fall on her; and Mr. Philip Fane, lounging at his ease with a cigarette between his lips, quickened his steps so as to meet her face to face.

A lovely blush, born of annoyance as well as shyness, spread over cheek and brow, as he caught his hat off his head, and took the cigarette out of his mouth, and exclaimed,—

"Miss Trevanion!" in astonishment at the surprising fact that she should be found in a road a few hundred yards from her home. She bent her head, and would have passed on without a word, only he had stopped straight in front of her.

"Allow me to carry that book for you!" "Thank you, but we are not going the same way," looking beyond him, but not at him. "But we shall be if I turn round," stretching out his hand for it.

"I have promised to take it to the Rectory." "So you shall, but you need not make a beast of burden of yourself on the road," taking hold of it.

In order to avoid a struggle she let go of it, but as soon as it was in his hand and out of hers she turned round.

"Now," she said, with a defiant bow, "I leave you to take it as you insist. Good afternoon."

She went a few paces before he recovered from his amazement, then he hurried after her.

"No, Miss Trevanion, I offered to carry it for you, not for the old lady at the Rectory."

"It has nothing to do with me," proudly. "Mrs. Willoughby sends it by your hands instead of mine to Mrs. Winder."

"But I decline; Mrs. Winder I don't know from Adam—or Eve, perhaps, I had better say, and I don't care a straw about providing food for her mind!"

"Then give it back to me." "No, I will carry the book to the gate, but no further."

"Then you won't carry it at all!" her eyes flashing defiance under the lace edge of her large parasol.

"Excuse me, I have set my heart on it, and I have never been beaten by a woman," looking down into her face with an imperturbable smile, which rarely boded good to man or woman.

"But you may be by a girl," and she walked on with her small round chin in the air, and her resolute face turned homewards.

Philip Fane bit his lip, and inwardly cursed her obstinacy. He felt that she had made a fool of him, but he was determined that there should be no reason for a quarrel between them. He therefore hid his mortification as best he could, and taking off his hat, bowed low as he placed the book in her hand.

"Take it back," he said, magnanimously, "and as you object to my company I will take myself off. I suppose my cousin has told you that I am a pauper, and warned you to turn the cold shoulder."

"Nothing of the sort," she said, indignantly. "I am a pauper myself, and I don't judge my friends by their pockets."

"So long as you count me for a friend I don't care," he said, with a smile. "I said nothing about it."

"Indeed you did, and I am not likely to forget it. Small mercies thankfully received," and, with a mocking look and a second bow, he walked off, leaving her to wonder if she had been too rude, or too proper.

Mrs. Winder was a good-natured, kind-hearted woman, with a plain face and an old-fashioned cap. Ill-natured critics said of her that she was the most unselfish woman under the sun, because she was always so much more interested in other people's business than her own; but her husband, a gentlemanly-looking man with a pale, refined face, boasted that his wife had such a large heart that she could take in the whole neighbourhood and still leave plenty of room for her own family.

Flora was a great favourite of hers, though neither her son nor her daughter could get on with her, and she kissed her heartily on each cheek, with a compliment attached to both kisses.

"Now come and sit down by me, my dear," leading her to a sofa, where comfort had been thought of instead of elegance, "and tell me all the news. It is such a comfort to have an unmarried man in the neighbourhood, because he is always the centre of interest. Now, how is it?" with a roguish twinkle in her eye, "that Sir Basil has managed to keep your brother up at

the Abbey? I thought you two were like the Siamese twins!"

"And so we were," her pretty lips pouting because the Rectory's wife alluded to her pet grievance; "but Eastace is so happy up at the Abbey that we can't get him away."

"I expect he is very useful as a magnet," pinching the girl's round arm. "Now, tell me, do you go up and see him every day of the week?"

"No, I can't do that," looking down at the carpet.

"Oh, you can't, can you? The next thing I shall hear will be that you are staying at the Abbey with Mr. Philip Fane."

"No, that you won't; Eastace must come home. He must like me better than a man whom he has only known for a few weeks," looking up into Mrs. Winder's kind face appealingly.

"There can be no doubt of that," she said, promptly; "but, my dear, it is a pleasant change for him, and I don't think you ought to grudge it him. As to yourself, it's quite another thing. Old friends are best; don't desert them for a stranger."

"I shouldn't think of such a thing," blushing to the roots of her hair. "But Sir Basil saved Eastace's life, and mine, too," she added, as if the last were not of the same consequence.

"Yes, my dear, and according to the old adage he ought to avoid you both like poison, for you are bound to do him an injury. You won't be offended if I give you a little word of advice."

"No, that I won't. I never mind what you say to me," pressing her hand affectionately.

"Don't have too much to do with him," sinking her voice to a mysterious whisper. "There is something about him that I don't trust, and something inside him that I can't make out. Now, what was the meaning of that placard? So very odd, you know—there must be some motive in the background. After five years' silence to break out like that!"

"Yes; but I think he had nothing to do with it," said Flora, eagerly, ready enough to champion him now that he was attacked, though she generally held her tongue when he was landed to the skies; "but if he had it was only very right of him to wish to avenge his cousin's death. Really, if you know him better you would find out how kind and considerate he is for everybody. He has the noblest heart in the world, and it is a shame that no one seems to give him credit for it."

Mrs. Winder tapped the carpet with her foot.

"Very pretty, my dear! I'm only thankful that he can't hear you. For Heaven's sake, take care! You are far too good to be trusted to the first stranger that turns up."

"If you talk like that I'll go. Why can't he be my friend, and nothing else?" standing up.

"Because men are made of flesh and blood. Don't go. Stay to tea, and Edgar shall walk back with you."

Flora shook her head with a smile.

"He must; there's an odd-looking man about."

"He won't hurt me. Good-bye."

"No, wait a minute. I believe Sir Basil's round the corner," laughing.

"Then I mustn't keep him waiting," and with a roguish glance over her shoulder she ran away, determined not to incur Emily's displeasure by accepting the escort of "her own especial young man."

CHAPTER XV.

"WELL, I never!" exclaimed Martha Jamieson, looking down at the glittering coin in her hand, just dropped into by Sir Basil Fane, before he rode away; "that he the kindest gentleman that ever stepped. When you tell him of a peck of trouble he don't cut you short in the middle, but he listens to you as if he was a woman, and gives you a word of comfort or advice, with something else to back it up!"

"He's got a open hand, but that's the only

blessed thing that's open about him!" rejoined a neighbour, with a laugh, as she looked after him over the edge of her small gate. "He knows how to keep his mouth shut when there's curious folk about, and how to cut a body short when he don't want to answer a question."

"More shame to them as has the impudence to worrit him. Sakes alive! If a gentleman—a right down gentleman—mayn't keep his affairs to his self without being picked to pieces, I wonder what the world's coming to!" and, hugging her baby to her breast, she went indoors, and flung the door to behind her, as a demonstration.

Sir Basil was doing his best to work up to a young girl's ideal of a model landlord, but he found it worse than any drudgery at the bar.

Finding that he would listen to them, every woman in the parish thought she had a right to pour into his ear every grievance that she had ever suffered from, no matter if it were of many years' standing; and the steward was in despair at the constant orders he had to see that such-and-such a job was done for people who had really enough money to do it for themselves.

He shook his head, and swore that the baronet would be ruined before ten years were over his head; but Sir Basil gave him to understand that he cared for his tenants' happiness and well-being, and not one rap for amassing a fortune.

"Think of those that will come after," urged Mitchell, with respectful entreaty.

"No, I'd leave that for Mr. Philip," said Sir Basil, sternly.

"Lor! sir! I hope he'll never be master here! The days of comfort will be over."

"Make the best of them, so long as they last—that's my advice to you," as he tied up a roll of paper with a string.

"But, begging your pardon, sir," twisting his hat round, and getting very red in the face, "ain't there enough pretty young ladies in the place for you to take your choice?"

"Enough and to spare. But I don't happen to be a marrying man." So saying, Sir Basil gave his steward a nod of dismissal, looked up his desk, and went out for a ride.

Not a marrying man! If the gossip in the place had only heard him; if Mrs. Willoughby, and both her girls had only had an inkling of it, there might have been more peace for the feminine hearts of the neighbourhood.

No, he would never marry, though he knew one pair of dark eyes which tempted him almost beyond the power of resistance.

What would do all in his power to make the girl his friend, insensibly to mould her will to his, and draw her into the habit of a sweet dependence.

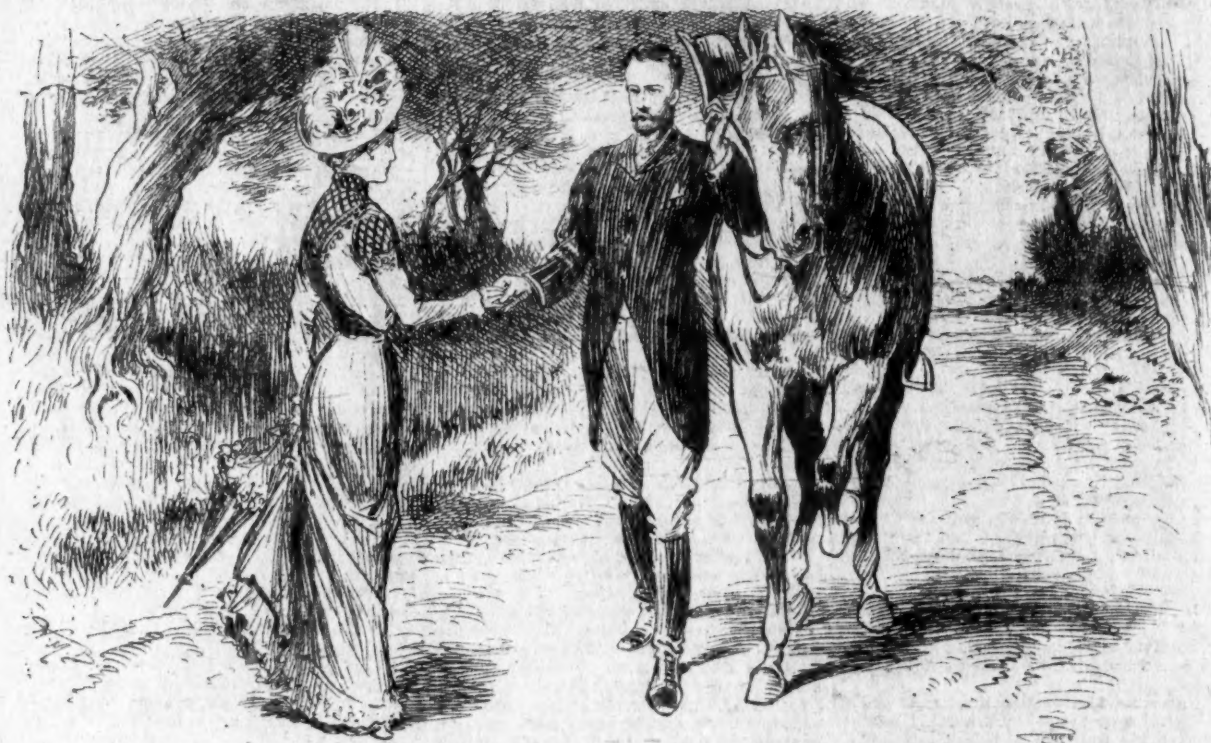
First, by the exercise of strong self-restraint, he must win her confidence, and overcome her shyness, then he must gradually slip into the part of adviser and confidant. After that, with Eastace in his hands as a powerful factor, what could prevent his life being sunned and beautified by the sweetest platonic friendship that the heart of the ancient heathen could devise?

His own conscience might have answered "Human weakness" as he rode on over the plastic turf, under the shade of ancient beeches, which were only less old than the proud and stainless name that he bore, through the young bracken in its tender green, where the deer were trying to find a shelter for their noble antlered heads.

It appeared a beautiful world to him that day, and everything that the heart of man delighted in seemed to be within his reach.

He saw himself looked up to by his tenants, honoured and respected by his neighbours, a power of some consideration in the land of his ancestors, strong to help, strong to resist, strong enough if need be to stand alone, or to win others to stand by him.

He had riches, he had position, he had everything that he could wish for except a girl's friendship. It had been promised him, but Heaven alone knew if the lips—the sweet, the lovable lips—that made the promises would also keep it.



"I WAS JUST THINKING OF YOU!" HE SAID, AS HE DISMOUNTED.

Others would try to win her away from him—Young Rivers, and a tribe of unknown eligibles in the future. Would she stand firm, always with one hand clasped in his, always with one corner of her priceless heart reserved for him alone?

On the answer to that question he felt that the happiness of his life depended, and he knew by the knowledge that comes to all when the golden days of thoughtless youth are past, that a man who risks his all in one frail craft is likely to lose his all in one night's storm.

There was a smile on his lips as he rode through the park and out by a side gate which led into a lane. Here in the outside world he felt that at any moment he might catch sight of the girl whom he had madly raised into an idol, and that gave a new brightness to the sun, a new beauty to the tangled hedgerows. It also gave him patience to listen to Martha Jameson's tale of woe without one sign of restless inattention, and when he went on a little further he was rewarded by the sight of a silver grey skirt, soft in colour as a dove's wing, and a white-plumed hat that shaded the sweetest face in Hampshire.

"I was just thinking of you," he said, in all sincerity, as he dismounted, and held her hand for one long minute in his. "I've disgusted Mitchell beyond all recovery by telling him that I'm not a marrying man. Do you think it dreadful of me to proclaim such a creed in a land of pretty girls like this?"

"Very wise," she said, with a smile, as her long lashes drooped over her blushing cheeks. "It may save a few people from indulging in vain hopes."

"I hope it will do something more for me than that," he said, gravely. "Won't it take all shyness from our future intercourse if you learn sometimes to look upon me as an elder brother—nothing more, and nothing less?"

"Oh, yes," and a light came into her eyes such as he had never seen before. "I would thank

Heaven from the bottom of my heart for giving me such a brother as you!"

A wave of emotion passed over his face, but by a violent effort he contrived to keep his voice steady.

"Then you won't be always fighting against me in the future? You will give in sometimes when I ask you?"

"That I will!" she said, heartily. "It was all nonsense that made me so obstinate; it will be quite different now."

"There will be nothing between us now!" he said, in a low voice.

"Nothing," she answered, promptly.

"Nothing at all!" he repeated. "No foolish prejudices, no idle conventionalities! You will come to me just as if my name were Trevanion—Basil Trevanion, your elder brother!"

"Yes," she assented, softly.

"And in course of time you will learn to love me like another Eustace?" looking down into her face as if he would read her very soul.

"In course of time, perhaps," playing with the tassel of her parasol, and feeling as if an iron hand prevented her from raising her eyes.

"And you will call me Basil?" coming very close to her, till the edge of her parasol knocked against his shoulder.

"Perhaps," she said, shyly, wishing herself back at the Firs, because her heart was beating so unmanageably.

"And you will come to my house just as if it were your own?"

"But I couldn't," opening wide her eyes.

"But you can, so long as my aunt is with me!" smiling at her astonishment.

"Ah, yes! but she won't stay."

"Perhaps I shall keep her, and Eustace too," laughing a little.

"No, Eustace must come back. Promise me that," lifting her eyes to his in earnest entreaty.

"I'd promise you anything," he said, gruffly; "even to cut my throat if you wished it."

"Don't do that. Now I must go, or my aunt will wonder what has become of me."

"I will walk down to the gate with you if you will allow me the honour. Soon, in the character of your brother, I shan't ask permission, but take it for granted."

"I wish I could make you a Trevanion really," she said, with a smile, as they walked along the road side by side; the horse keeping pace with them, as Sir Basil had slung the bridle over his arm.

"Think of me as a Trevanion, and call me Basil for once," bending low to look into her face.

"Send me back my brother, and I'll call you anything you like," the pink colour rising in her cheeks.

"He shall come, upon my word of honour he shall," earnestly; "but not yet, Flo. You can spare him a little longer."

They parted at the gate, he holding her hand in a long, tender clasp, and she letting it rest in his grasp, because he wished for her friendship, and nothing more! Friendship is the snare in which many pretty feet are caught, but Firs Trevanion was in the happy stage when credulity is the synonym of youth.

Sir Basil Fane rode home that day happier than he had been for many years past. As he neared the private gate his horse shied at something that startled him, and it was only thanks to his rider's good seat that he was not thrown in the dust.

The "something" was a yellow placard which flanneted right across the palling, with the words,—

"MURDER!"

"ONE THOUSAND POUNDS REWARD!"

at the top. It was not there when Sir Basil passed through earlier in the day, but the hand of some enemy had placed it there now to cast the shadow of death across his rising hopes.

(To be continued.)



"WELCOME HOME, MY DEAR!" SAID THE OLD EARL.

CAN YOU BLAME HER?

—103—

CHAPTER X

SOMEWHERE in north-east Yorkshire, not many miles from Whitby, stood Allerton Towers, the grand old seat of the Earls of Allerton.

For centuries the estates had descended from father to son. Never had there been the want of a dual heir, until the succession of the present peer.

Lord Allerton came to his honours late in life. He had been a widower many years, and openly announced that his nephew, a brave young soldier, would at his death become master of the Towers.

Alas for human nature and the resolutions of elderly nobles! a witty housekeeper obtained such influence over the Earl that she induced him to marry her privately, and presented him in five years with three pledges of affection—a boy and two girls.

Perhaps Lord Allerton felt a trifle ashamed of his infatuation; perhaps he felt certain the new Countess would not be received by his friends, for he never proclaimed his marriage.

It was only when his nephew thought of taking a bride and wished to know his exact position, that he might satisfy the curiosity of his beloved one's parents, that the truth leaked out.

There was a complete revolution at Allerton. The nephew went abroad, and died a soldier's death; the county turned their backs upon the Towers, and refused to associate with the old-devil housekeeper.

Perhaps she was not so agreeable, now she had nothing more to gain; perhaps she pulled the yoke a little too closely.

Lord Allerton was barely sixty, and he began to revolt. His eyes opened. Certain things in his lady's conduct struck him as rather strange.

Really alarmed, he placed his domestic affairs in the hands of a lawyer, who promptly discovered that Lady Allerton had no right to that

title, since she had been married to the butler years before she gained the Earl's notice; in point of fact, she was not—she had never been a countess; and the children, known as Viscount Stuart and the Ladies Maude and Evangeline Stuart had no drop of the Stuarts' blood in their veins, but were the son and daughters of the aforesaid butler.

The affair was a nine days' wonder. The false countess and her progeny left the Towers, and the Earl, a little ashamed of his own credulity, went abroad.

He stayed there two years, but he never proposed to another lady. He returned to the Towers a bachelor, and people noticed the worried expression he had had during the reign of the supposed countess was quite gone, and he seemed ten years younger.

One trouble, and one trouble only, preyed upon his mind—he had no heir. Doubtless there were second or third cousins scattered somewhere on the face of the earth who at his death would struggle for his wealth and title; but there was no one whom he knew as of his own blood whom he could adopt and think of as a son.

"If Maxwell had only lived!" mourned the Earl to his old comrades. "He was cut out for an English noble. It would have been like having a son of my own to come after me."

"You'd better marry," returned the comrade, enthusiastically, quite forgetting the disasters which had attended the Earl's late attempt at entering the married state.

"No!" thundered Lord Allerton. "I've had enough of that! I would not marry now if I knew a chimney-sweep were to come after me."

And so Lord Allerton lived at the Towers; and, beyond a very real regret for his nephew and frequent lamentations respecting his heirless condition, he really passed a very happy life.

When the African war was over and its heroes had returned to England he went up to see his boy's officers, and then he learned a piece of news which very much surprised him.

"Maxwell was married," asserted Colonel

Delaval. "Don't look so electrified, my dear Lord Allerton. I assure you it's the simple truth."

"But why didn't he tell me! How on earth did he keep his wife?"

"It's a sad story. It was at the time your domestic felicity had just been made public. Of course no father would have given his daughter to the captain of a marching regiment. They eloped. Max went to the war, and she went home to her parents."

"And he told you this!"

"When he was dying. I think it lay heavy at his heart that he had left his wife in such a terrible position. She was living at home as an unmarried girl. He had made her promise not to reveal her marriage. When he knew that he was dying, that he never could go back to her, his remorse was fearful. He had her fate before him. If, as he believed, she became the mother of his child, what would become of her?"

"He might have applied to me," said Lord Allerton, stiffly. "I would have loved the poor young creature as a daughter."

"I was on the spot. I suppose it was easier to speak than write. I promised him to write to my wife in England, and commend his poor young widow to her. Alas for human promises! I was struck down by a bullet before the night was over. I was in hospital for weeks, and when I could take up a pen, and write to the poor girl giving her my wife's address, I felt it was too late—that she would never receive my letter."

"And did she?"

"No; I wrote to Miss Brown, Atherstone Post-office, Red Cross, Kent, but I felt the name was an assumed one. It was no surprise to me when the letter came back to me through the dead-letter office. When I came to England I went to Atherstone, but the old deaf crone at the post-office could give me no information, beyond that a very pretty girl fetched the letters, and seemed heart-broken when there were none. It's a

strange story, Lord Allerton. I've had it in my mind to write to you more than once, but I thought we were sure to meet some day, and the delay mattered little."

"Max has been dead nearly three years."

"Aye. The child, if there was one, would be born in the summer of seventy-nine."

"And is my heir?"

"Undoubtedly; but you have to find him, and it is a delicate matter. I fear if your search were made public a dozen young widows would come forward claiming to be Maxwell's widow, and having children of the required age."

"And we have no clue."

"Yes! He always wore a locket containing her photograph. It was buried with him at his desire, but I should know the face it contained amongst a hundred. It was the loveliest I ever saw."

Lord Allerton looked bewildered.

"But there is nothing to go upon."

"Nothing, save that they were married and parted within a week; also she must have been living within a walk of Atherstone, but Atherstone is only seven miles from a market town, with fifteen thousand inhabitants, so that is not much guide."

"What do you advise me to do?"

"Keep your eyes and ears open. Tell these particulars to some clever detective and let him do his best, but don't stir in the matter yourself."

This conversation took place in the summer following Hyacinth Carlyle's exile from home.

Lord Allerton went back to the Towers, and Colonel Delaval established himself at Ventnor, whose warm climate particularly recommended itself to the invalided soldier.

Truly it was no mere chance which took him there, but the influence of fate.

The first night he was there, sitting at the window in idle, seaside fashion, he became acquainted with his next-door neighbour, a maiden lady of the name of Johnson, and her little nephew.

Fond of children, Colonel Delaval soon made friends with the noble boy, and after taking him on his knee and caressing him there came the question,—

"What is your name, my child?"

"Max."

"Max!" repeated the Colonel to himself; "and are your parents down here?"

The old lady looked troubled at the question.

The boy shook his head doubtfully, and she said with a sigh,—

"He is an orphan, sir. His father died a soldier's death before Max was born."

Colonel Delaval started.

"Madam, would you allow me a few moments' conversation with you? I believe I have something of great importance to communicate."

Miss Johnson shook her head.

"You mean kindly, sir. No doubt you wish to speak to me of the claim the boy has upon the State as a soldier's orphan, but little Max needs nothing from strangers. He is the only child of one I loved as—as a daughter, and when I die I shall leave him all I have."

But Colonel Delaval persisted in his request, and so, a little surprised at his persistency, the spinster agreed to receive him the next morning in her little drawing-room.

"I should like you to be there," she said to Lady Hyacinth. "I am sure Colonel Delaval has something to say to me about Max, and you ought to hear it."

So Hyacinth stayed.

Colonel Delaval started as he recognised the lovely face he had first seen in Captain Stuart's locket; but oh! how changed, how altered!

"She looks like one whose heart is broken," he thought to himself. "I suppose her happiness lies buried in Maxwell's grave."

Miss Johnson presented her darling to the stranger in due form as Lady Hyacinth Carlyle.

"Sir John is travelling on the Continent, and in his absence his wife cheers my loneliness. Sir, may I ask the nature of your communication respecting the little boy?"

"I believe him to be the heir of one of Eng-

land's noblest families. I believe, Miss Johnson, that his father was a fellow officer of my own—one I loved and trusted, whose eyes I closed."

Hyacinth was trembling from head to foot.

"Everything coincides," went on the Colonel.

"My friend was Maxwell Stuart, this boy's name is Max. Stuart's child is over two years old."

Miss Johnson looked at Hyacinth.

The mother, who had never dared to claim her child, who might not receive the highest title earth knows from his baby lips, turned to Colonel Delaval.

"And even if he were the son of Maxwell Stuart, what then?"

"He would be the great nephew of Francis Earl of Allerton, the heir of one of the richest estates in Yorkshire. Upon his death-bed Stuart confided his marriage to me, and urged me to befriend his wife, and, to might be, his child. Alas! after months of illness, I recovered sufficiently to write to Atherstone post-office. My letter was returned to me unopened. She to whom it was addressed had left the place."

Hyacinth rose and fixed her beautiful eyes upon the stranger's face.

"You are a gentleman and a soldier," she breathed. "Can I trust you?"

"I will regard your confidence as sacred; but, Lady Hyacinth, I know the secret you would tell me. The moment I saw your face I recognised it for the same in Stuart's locket, which was buried with him. One feels strange convictions sometimes. I do not ask for proofs—something within me tells me that you are Maxwell Stuart's widow, that the boy Max is your son and his."

The tears rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"I would not distress you for worlds," said the soldier, with respectful sympathy. "Lady Hyacinth, why should you mourn the discovery of your secret? To many minds it would be a title of honour that they were Maxwell Stuart's widow."

"You don't understand."

The Colonel looked helpless.

"Trust me," he pleaded. "I was your husband's friend—I want to serve his wife and son."

"I loved him dearly," said Hyacinth, "but I was so young, almost a child, and—"

"And you accepted another suitor! My dear, it was not natural at eighteen that you should spend your whole future in sorrow. I hope Sir John Carlyle prizes the treasure he has won."

It was Miss Johnson who explained all—all she knew, that is. It never dawned on her, or anyone else, to guess the Baronet doubted his wife's first marriage.

Colonel Delaval listened with angry attention.

"He must be mad."

Hyacinth shook her head.

"He is only angry at my deceit."

"But—"

"He will never forgive me while he lives. Oh! Colonel Delaval, I have lost them both. My husband has decreed that for all time we shall be strangers, and yet he will not suffer me to own my child."

"You must own him, Lady Hyacinth. He must be acknowledged as the heir of Allerton."

She shook her head.

"I cannot."

"My dear, think of your boy's future."

"I cannot," repeated Hyacinth. "I can only think of my husband. Oh! Colonel Delaval, why can't I die!—that would solve all difficulties. Sir John would be free to marry again, and Max would be in his proper place."

The Colonel looked at her pitifully—she was so young, so fair to see. It seemed to him monstrous that her whole life should be wrecked.

"I am old enough to be your father," he said, gently. "Will you try to think I am in Lord Norman's place, and answer me a few questions?"

"Willingly."

"Your parents knew nothing of your first marriage, I imagine?"

"Nothing."

"Then when Sir John made you his wife in what name did the ceremony take place? how

did you sign the register? how were you described in the license?"

She flashed.

"As Hyacinth Norman, spinster, I signed the same. I knew it was wrong, but I thought it would not matter—no one would ever know."

"There are no children of your second marriage!"

"Only one in Heaven."

"Thank Heaven." Then seeing her startled face, "My dear, I have a painful thing to tell you. You are not Sir John's wife, you never have been—the fact of your knowingly letting yourself be described by a false name would, I believe, render the marriage null and void."

"He was not sufficient lawyer to be sure of this, but it was his belief."

"Then he is free?"

"To my mind he is bound by a solemn duty to repair the mistake as soon as possible."

"No," she said, gently, "he is free—it is what I longed to be able to give him."

"If he has a spark of honour he would not accept such a freedom."

Hyacinth sighed.

"Then nothing can free him but my death?"

And then a strange thought came to the neglected wife—a thought born of the purest, most unselfish love. She knew her faithful friend and benefactress was slowly and surely dying of an incurable internal disease. The woman who had given her so many things would not refuse her one last boon.

Hyacinth put out her hand and clasped the Colonel's.

"You were Maxwell's friend, I know you will grant my request. Say nothing of this meeting to Lord Allerton, I will think over things and let you know my decision."

Left alone she sat down in a low stool beside her old governess, and both cried bitterly.

"Hyacinth, must you refuse! You and the little one might be the old Earl's potted children; you would be loved and cared for. Dear, don't you know my days are numbered! Who will care for Max and his mother when I am gone?"

"Are you sure," breathed Hyacinth, "quite sure that nothing can save you?"

"Perfectly."

"You love me. You will not be hurt at what I am going to propose?"

And then the scheme was unfolded. They would leave Ventnor at once. They would go far away, as Miss Johnson and her nephew and Lady Hyacinth Carlyle, only the dying woman should bear the latter name, only Sir John should believe his wife dead and his freedom gained.

"It cannot hurt him," said Hyacinth, feverishly, "even if he chose another to bear my name and fill my place, since our marriage was illegal. There would be no flaw in hers. She would be his wife, and I—"

"My darling!" said her kind old friend, "don't you see you would be putting it out of his power ever to be reconciled to you?"

"You don't know John as I do; his word is fixed and changeless. He would never take me to his heart again, never while he lived."

"And then, if this plan were carried out—"

"I should take the name I have never really used; I should go to Lord Allerton as his nephew's widow. 'Lady Hyacinth' would be forgotten; henceforward I should be plain Mrs. Stuart, the mother of little Max. See, dear, it is the only way I could keep my boy."

And in a few days Colonel Delaval learned their plan and gave his sanction to it.

They went to Whitby, where Dr. Warburton was once more residing. To him they told their story, and claimed his aid.

He it was who suggested sending for the Earl of Norman and his wife, who took care they should arrive too late, and who broke to them the fact that Miss Johnson "was too worn out by sorrow to see them."

He managed everything; and when the funeral was over, drove Hyacinth and the boy in his own carriage to Allerton Tower.

The Earl had been warned of their coming.

Colonel Delaval had written mainly in praise of "Mrs. Stuart."

The certificate of her marriage and of Maxwell's birth were in his hands.

Two things he ignored, that she had been Lord Norman's daughter, and that another wedding-ring than Maxwell's was on her finger.

Great preparations had been made at the Towers for her reception. The servants, drawn up in long array, waited in the hall; not one of them but rejoiced at the coming of the Captain's wife and child.

He had been dearly loved in his boyhood's home; besides, history repeats itself, and the retainers had feared Lord Allerton, in his desire for an heir, might yet again be lured into marriage with an adventuress.

Leaning on Dr. Warburton's arm, leading her little child, Hyacinth entered the home which must one day be her own.

The old Earl caught both her hands in his and kissed her brow.

"Welcome home, my dear! Why, what a child you look! and how ill! But we'll soon set that to rights. And this is the little boy!"

He took Max in his arms, and showed him to his assembled servants.

"My nephew's son," he said, proudly, "Maxwell Stuart; may he walk in his father's footsteps. I ask you one and all to treat this boy as though he were in truth my child. He is my heir; whenever I am called away the coronet of the Allertons must be his."

A cheer arose, the servants clustered forward to look at the little heir, the last scion of a noble race, the boy whose very being Sir John Carlyle considered a disgrace.

There was but one voice in the servants' hall that night; one and all, young and old, had lost their heart to the sad, sweet-faced lady whom they knew now had been their favourite's bride.

"The sweetest, fairest mistress Allerton ever had!" proclaimed the old coachman. "But she's over young to spend her life in fretting for him that's gone. The old Earl ought to find her a husband before he has to go; the little one 'll need a father's care, and his mother's all too fragile not to want a husband's strength."

All the county families called on Mrs. Stuart. Her perfect grace, her rare, high-born beauty, charmed them all.

There had been one or two disposed to be curious as to her parentage, but her appearance disarmed their doubts.

After they had once seen her they never troubled as to her origin; they felt instinctively she came of noble birth.

"What am I to call you, my dear!" asked her fond old uncle. "I confess your name, pretty as it is, has a strange sound in my ears. You have an English face—why did they give you a foreign title?"

She smiled half sadly.

"I do not like the name of Hyacinth, it has many painful associations for me. Max always called me *Queenie*, and my second name is Anne; perhaps one of these would please you?"

"I like *Queenie* best."

"It is so long since I heard it, the sound of it will make me feel quite young again."

He laughed.

"You speak as if you were Methuselah. How old are you, my child?"

"I was twenty-one the day I came to you. It is just three years since I married Max."

"Poor child, poor child! how you must have suffered. But you are like my own daughter now, and I will make you happy."

She could have told him it was a task beyond performance, that for all time she and happiness had parted company, only he was so good to her she could not bear to vex him.

For some months they lived tranquilly in their lovely Yorkshire home, then Lord Allerton conceived a great desire to go to London for the season.

"You have never been presented, *Queenie*!"

"Never."

Twice she had been near it, but, for reasons of her own, she deferred it the first time, and Sir John Carlyle had kept her abroad the year after

their marriage, until the gaieties of London were over.

Positively Hyacinth knew no one in the great metropolis; she need fear no recognition from friends. A host of titled people had come to her second wedding, but they would not recognise her after that brief view.

True, Colonel Delaval had known her from her picture, but that photograph, taken in her neglected childhood, had always had something wistful in its expression.

Our heroine decided she might run the gauntlet of criticism fearlessly. Lord and Lady Norman were abroad, no one else would be likely to notice a resemblance between Hyacinth Carlyle and Lord Allerton's widowed niece.

In truth, she was greatly changed. The year since she left The Elms, although full of sorrow, had been absolutely free from pressing care or anxious fears. The tranquil life had restored the bloom to her cheek, the brilliancy to her eye; the mouth was sad, though less sad than in those months at Ventnor; mother-love had given a new sweetness and tenderness to the face, and since that grave had been placed in Whitby Churchyard, since Sir John was free to wed another wife, and his first love had lost that terrible remorse of having wronged him, a strange peace was stamped upon her brow.

"You are sure to marry, my dear," said the old Earl, fondly, when they were settled in Eaton-square; "but you must promise me one thing—you won't leave me while I live. It would be like losing Max over again to have to part from you and the boy."

"I will never leave you, uncle."

She kissed him tenderly on the forehead. She loved him dearly, this old man who was so fond of her, who treated her almost as his own child.

A noble duchess, a distant connection of Lord Allerton, was to present his niece. She had rather objected until she saw the young lady, then she was alacrity itself.

"Anne will be the belle of the season," she pronounced oracularly. "It seems incredible she should be a widow."

But the fact remained, and so her Grace could not choose a *débutante's* attire of spotless white, as would have been her wish; but the Earl gave her *carte blanche* as to expenses, and a Court milliner was so delighted with Mrs. Stuart's face as to exercise her best skill, and the result was charming.

The old duchess had been right. Of all the beautiful women who courted to Her Majesty, not one could compare with the young widow.

Her praises were in everyone's mouth, Royal lips designed to speak of her surpassing loveliness, and the Earl's triumph was complete.

"It is like having a daughter of my own, because I am sure no one could enjoy your triumphs more. I feel proud of such a beautiful chateau for my old house."

But the world at large accepted the Earl's invitations greedily. Nay, they coveted these invitations as things greatly to be desired; in a word, Mrs. Stuart was the fashion, and the highest names in Belgravia coveted her acquaintance.

Before she had been in society a month lovers had come and gone. Men with titles as old as Lord Allerton's own had pleaded for his consent to address his niece.

They never listened patiently to his statement of what he meant to give her; they told him with one voice she was a fortune in herself—they wanted nothing but her white hand.

At first Lord Allerton carried their proposals to his darling. At first he honestly tried to point out to her the advantages of some of them, but the result was always the same—a bitter fit of weeping, followed too often by hours of depression.

At last the peer gave in to her desire, and promised she should be troubled by no more such proposals. She told him never while she lived would she take another husband. She was not miserable, not discontented with her lot, only this perpetual talk of marriage wearied her and made her life a misery.

She went everywhere, no party was counted complete without her presence. When she drove in the Park with her little boy, men vied with each other whose horse should go beside her carriage.

At the opera, garden-parties, picnics, flower-shows, her face was seen, leaning on the old Earl's arm, as though she were in very truth his daughter.

But the child was not neglected. Little Max was his mother's one great tie to life. For his sake only did she struggle with the burden of sorrow ever at her heart, for his sake she did violence to her feelings.

Gaiety could not drown her sorrow, society could not make her forget the husband who had neglected her; but it seemed to the girl to please him by seeming to enjoy the gaiety which surrounded her was the one only return she could make to the old man who was so good to her.

"You positively must dine with me next Tuesday," said the Duchess to Mrs. Stuart. "I have an inconsolable widower coming, and I want you to comfort him by the spell of your fascinations."

Her listener sighed. She was thinking of another widower, who certainly was not inconsolable.

"Who is he?"

The Duchess of Carnegie smiled.

"The richest commoner of the day. Surely you have heard of him!"

Hyacinth was silent. She had grown white to her very lips. She waited in an agony of doubt until the Duchess spoke again.

"I am almost forgetting. You are as innocent as a convent maid. I mean Sir John Carlyle. He is the richest commoner in England. I don't think anyone quite knows how rich."

"And he is a widower?"

"Yes. It's a most romantic story. He married a girl out of the schoolroom, and made his honeymoon last nearly a year. Then he brought her home, and they spent a few months at his lovely seat in Kent, but nothing prospered with them. The child died, and the wife went out of her mind."

"How terrible!" bawled out at this strange version of her own story. "But are you quite sure?"

"Certain, my dear. Her husband worshipped her. He would never by any chance have gone abroad without her could he have kept her with him—he has been travelling half over the world. She died last November; but I suppose he could not bring himself to face society while his grief was still so fresh. He has been in England about two months, and has just come to town for the season."

"Ah! I suppose he has a town house!" thinking of the noble mansion which had been refurnished and decorated for herself, though fate had decreed she should never cross its threshold.

"Oh, dear, yes; but he has not gone there. It is a huge place, absurd for a single man. Sir John has chambers in Clarges-street, and I expect he will spend a great deal of his time with us. Carnegie met him abroad, and they are the most devoted friends."

"Carnegie" was her Grace's son, a young man of thirty, who, up to this time, had steadily refused to please the daughters of Belgravia by making his mother a dowager. He was a pleasant, easy-tempered young fellow, and Hyacinth had grown intimate with him on the strength of their remote connection.

When she blushed crimson at her Grace's words that lady ascribed her confusion to the mention of the young Duke.

"Then you will come on Tuesday!" repeated the Duchess. "You know my rooms would lose their brightest ornament if you refused, and Carnegie would be disconsolate."

"I hope not."

Her Grace stared at the young widow.

"My dear child, don't pretend ignorance; you must know that my boy has lost his head. I have often wished he would marry; but I think I am glad now he delayed. In all England I never saw a creature I desired more for a daughter-in-law than yourself."

"Please don't!" murmured Hyacinth. "Oh, Duchess, why won't people understand! I shall never marry—never! I mean to devote my life to Max."

Her Grace shook her head.

"I know you say so, but I don't at all despair of my son's success. I like you all the better, my dear, for your fidelity to the dead."

"It is not that," and the girl put her slender hand confidently into the matron's. "You must never think that. I loved Maxwell dearly, but I have left off grieving for his loss. I would not recall him if I could, only I have no thought of love or marriage. I mean to remain all my days just as I am."

"You will come on Tuesday! Remember, child, you don't commit yourself to spending your life with Carnegie because you pass one evening at his house."

It was a great temptation. Hyacinth had never seen her husband since they parted in the presence of their dead child. She had never heard his voice since he spoke the cruel words which parted them for all time. Her very heart longed for one sight of his face, and why should she not be gratified! Sir John believed his wife sleeping in a remote country churchyard. He had seen her grave. He would never dream of associating her with the brilliant beauty with whose praise Belgrave rang. What could Lord Allerton's niece have in common with the girl he had openly condemned as a disgrace to his name. Of course he would see a resemblance, would be struck by a passing likeness to the wife he had disowned, but there would be no danger of his suspecting her secret.

She would see him—the man who had sworn at the altar to cherish her for all time. She would hear his voice, perhaps touch his hand. Alas! for poor Hyacinth. The very thought filled her with rapture—with happiness too great for utterance.

She loved him, ah! how well! She knew long since that her girlhood's hero, her soldier lover, her boy's father, had been as nothing to her compared to the man who had saved her from a cruel death, and made her his own in spite of all obstacles, who had cherished her as the treasure of his life until he knew she had deceived him.

To Hyacinth it was always she that had erred. She never blamed her husband. In her eyes he had only fulfilled his own words when he told her, in the first hour of their engagement, he could never brook a rival dead or living.

Poor Hyacinth!

She went to her room very early on the Tuesday afternoon, and, seating herself at the mirror, looked at her own fair image with more care than she had ever bestowed on it since the days when she used to deck herself to please Sir John's fastidious taste.

Then she was altered since those days.

Her beautiful hair had been shaved in that terrible fever, and from some fancy she had never let it grow long again. It clustered now in short silky curls all over her graceful head. Some strayed upon her white forehead. Her face was calmer, more in repose, than it had been before. Hyacinth Carlyle had been nervous, excitable—a creature of tears and smiles.

The Honourable Mrs. Stuart was a dignified matron, despite her youth, her girlish appearance. She had a nameless self-possession. She looked, as her Grace of Carnegie had declared, fit to be a duchess.

Her maid came in to inquire her wishes. The girl had laid out a toilet of pink and white, but her mistress moved it aside.

"I must wear black to-night, Marie."

The servant stared.

"Black, madame? Surely—"

"No," interrupted Hyacinth. "I must have black."

Marie searched in the wardrobe, and declared there was nothing there of the objectionable shades—whites, pinks, greys, but no single robe of black. Hyacinth rose herself. The whole wardrobe of the late Countess of Allerton, the wife of the Earl's youth, had been placed at her

disposal—the laces and jewels, the old brocade and furs. Crossing the room she passed to a small apartment where most of these were stored, opened the great chest, and took out a costume of black velvet. She handed it to her maid.

"Madam!" exclaimed the Abigail in dismay, "it will not fit. It will be old-fashioned!"

"Never mind, Marie; I have a fancy to wear it. Lord Allerton says I am just his wife's height. I dare say the fit won't be very bad."

There was no excuse for poor Marie. She shook out the dress a little disdainfully, and proceeded to array her lady in it, but when she had finished she was breathless with pleasure and surprise.

None of the marvels purchased from Court milliners had ever suited Mrs. Stuart so well. She looked like some empress of the night. The maid took from a casket some diamond stars and fastened them in the soft hair, and then she surveyed her work with well-satisfied eyes.

"I never saw you look so lovely, madam!" she exclaimed, respectfully.

Lord Allerton said the same.

When the boy was brought to say good-night to her he put his little arms round her neck and told her to wear that dress when she went to Heaven, the angels would like it so.

Hyacinth kissed the child with a sigh, and went out to the carriage upon her uncle's arm.

"He will not know me," she thought to herself. "He will never guess that this brilliant woman of fashion is little Nan's mother."

Little Nan. Ah! no mother who has lost a child ever forgets that loss. Hyacinth had her firstborn, and yet she mourned for her little daughter, the child who had never kissed her name, whose baby fingers had so early been stilled for ever.

"We are early," remarked the Earl. "Is it a large party, because—"

"I really do not know."

"Given in honour of Sir John Carlyle, I understand. It seems he is a friend of the Duke's."

"Yes."

"I knew him well as a boy—a trifle fast, but his heart was always in the right place. He could not boast such an old descent, but he was ten times more of a man than Carnegie."

"How strange that you should know him!"

"Hardly, my dear. Your husband and he were sworn friends. Maxwell brought whom he liked to the Towers. At one time John Carlyle spent half the year with us."

"And you have lost sight of him."

"He quarrelled with me at the time of my—my mistake (so he always alluded to his own infatuation for the housekeeper). He was so fond of Max, you see, he resented the injury to his prospects. I don't suppose I have seen him for nearly four years. Well, times are changed with us both. Poor Max is dead, and Sir John, they say, is a widower."

Hyacinth wondered if the age of miracles were over—her husband and her boy's father friends! Ah! but then Sir John had never stooped to inquire the dead man's name; if he had maybe things would have been different.

They reached Carnegie House in good time. His Grace came forward to receive them, and himself led Hyacinth to the drawing-room. All eyes were on them when they entered; every one of those assembled there knew the Duke's one desire was to make the fair woman on his arm his wife; and not a few believed that the matter would be definitely settled that night.

Hyacinth took a seat near the Duchess, and then, to her intense relief, her host was called away.

As in a dream she sat there watching the brilliant scene; as in a dream she noticed the familiar faces, and tried to make answer to the remarks addressed to her; then suddenly her heart-beats quickened—the last guest had arrived.

She could not trust herself to speak; she played absently with her fan, glad of its protection to shade her face. She knew by instinct that her husband had entered the room.

Growing calmer she ventured to look up. Yes, there he stood, conversing with the Duchess, a little older, a little graver, but otherwise unchanged.

Hyacinth's thoughts went back with one rush of memory to the time they parted. As in a dream she saw her child's dead face; the room seemed to swim round with her, and only by a fearful effort did she save herself from fainting. For a moment she could not distinguish the words spoken to her; the room itself seemed to have changed in some wonderful way to the nursery at The Elms. That awful scene seemed taking place again.

Hyacinth put one hand to her heart to still its beating, murmured one prayer to Heaven for aid, then her composure slowly returned. The crisis was passed; the outraged wife, the bereaved mother, had vanished, only the beautiful, fascinating widow remained. It was but just in time; already the butler had announced dinner, and the Duchess was standing before Hyacinth with a gentleman at her side.

"Mrs. Stuart, Sir John Carlyle—Sir John, Lord Allerton's niece, the widow of your old friend, Maxwell Stuart."

And so, after months of parting, after bitter heartaches, they met again as strangers.

(To be continued.)

EVER YOURS.

—10—

(Continued from page 200.)

They both advanced then, treading the fresh green of the grass beneath their feet to where Lord Gothard was.

"I want you both to come with me," he said, and then he led the way to where the grounds of Castle Towers emerged on to the road, along which they proceeded until not far distant the church, around the battresses where the ivy clambered, came in view.

A few yards further and they were within the pretty churchyard itself, the birds carolling their songs overhead, and the tiny snowdrops hanging their white heads over the green graves.

"Do you like it?" he asked, the while he stopped before where a large white cross denoted the spot where they had laid their darling, and clinging around it, cut from the stone of spotless marble, were the roses, with their attendant leaves which she had so dearly loved in life.

They were with her now, watching over her in her last long sleep, and Jack stood with his head uncovered whilst he read the inscription placed thereon by Lord Gothard's orders:—

"Sacred to the memory of the Honourable Gertrude Disney Gothard, only daughter of Lord and Lady Gothard, aged eighteen—The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away."

It was all. But for some moments each, absorbed with their own thoughts, remained silently by, and then Jack grasped his lordship's hand. He could not speak, but that hand-pressure told in more than words what was passing in his mind.

And afterwards they turned, closing the gate behind them, for they had looked their last on the grave now glided by the rays of the setting sun, and over which the birds were singing their evening vespers.

Once more Gunn's Corner; but a change has come over it within the last twelve months, and in place of the shabby, thread-worn carpet which had done duty for so many years, there was another now, into which the feet sunk noiselessly, the while many of the chairs, which for broken limbs should long ago have been in hospital, were now thrown out as incurable, others of superior make serving in their stead; and not only in the furniture department was the change perceptible.

The neighbours, who had been wont to speak in no measured terms of the poverty of the Merrivales (poor things!), ascribing all their misfortunes and want of means to bad management, being at a loss to understand the sudden leap they had made to comparative wealth.

But from no one could the truth be ascertained which would have solved the riddle respecting the sudden affluence with which Mrs. Merivale and her daughters were surrounded, which had been ascribed to every source but the correct one.

And so the quarterly payments of the five hundred pounds allowed by Mrs. Sugden, junior, came punctually to hand, until curiosity eventually died out.

And Josephine has paid her promised visit to Castle Towers, contrary to Netta's prognostication, and, greatly to her astonishment, leaving it as the affianced wife of Lord Fitz Gibbon.

Ten years have passed since then, and Lord Gothard has never regretted when he resigned his claim to the hand of the girl he loved so dearly in favour of Jack Sugden. He has grown very old now, though a smile of happiness still plays around his aged features, as he sits in the bright sunlight, where he can see the children—her children—in their merry play; and then he will turn to where she is resting by his chair watching for Jack's return, holding her hand in his.

"I am so happy, Netta!" he whispers. "Castle Towers will never want an heir. It is yours, darling, and your children's children to the end—ever yours."

(THE END.)

SWEETHEART AND TRUE.

CHAPTER VIII.—(continued)

"I BELIEVE I have mentioned everything," he goes on, with laughing reflection, not waiting for any answer from her; "stay, though, I did not add my age. Thirty last year. Quite a sober, steady time of life. You know, I think we ought to know a little more about one another than we do," more seriously.

Olive waits a moment, then says, a little sorrowfully,—

"I am afraid I cannot tell you very much about myself, for indeed, I do not know. When I have asked Miss Daunt she has always answered, 'you will know in good time,' or 'someday'; or sometimes it was 'do not ask foolish questions, Olive,' so I have long ago given up asking her at all. I must wait until the time she speaks of comes, whenever that may be. I suppose I shall know some time or other, if there is anything to know, after all," she ends, so wearily.

The girl has long since given up that craving for knowledge she had felt at one time—a craving always damped and checked by Miss Daunt's chill words and manner. Now, however, it comes back to her for the moment. Why should it be denied to her to tell this new friend such simple facts as a matter of course, like any other girl; and yet she cannot, because she does not know herself.

"Well!" he returns cheerily, the next moment, "I am content to know that you are a very pleasant and enjoyable companion. There is not much in a pedigree after all said and done. I daresay you will one day find yourself to be a rich princess with a fairy godmother, perhaps, and then—and then very likely a Prince Charmant will come and steal you away from Pont l'Abbaye, to reign over other hearts and kingdoms."

"Ah!" she says, wistfully looking at him; "you are building up a pretty little castle in the air to please me. I am afraid it will never be like that, never, never."

"Why not? Everything and anything is possible in this odd world of ours. Nothing is too strange to be true. You must not look upon the sad dull side of your life. It is a mistake to do so, believe me. Depend upon it my words will come true, even to the Prince Charmant at the end."

"No, never!" answers Olive, with a flush and shake of the head.

"Are you so averse to the idea of a Prince

Charmant, then?" he queries, slowly, gazing meaningfully at the bright, sweet face before him.

"What do you mean by a Prince Charmant?" she says, in small confusion.

"Well, a sweetheart, a lover, or something answering to that description. Are you so averse to the idea of anything of that kind in the future?"

"I never mean to marry," she returns soberly, in answer.

"Oh! you have quite decided on that score, already, have you?" he argues quietly, still gazing at her. "Well, I don't know whether to applaud your intention or not; but you seem to have made your decision very early in life. Let me see, I think you are twenty, you said so, if I recollect rightly!"

"Just twenty," she assents.

"And at twenty you say you have fully made up your mind never to marry. Between this and twenty-five you will probably think differently, and change that mind of yours."

"I think not," Olive answers, looking at the water running past the boat.

"Well, we will not argue the point," he says, with an air of conviction.

"There will not be any time to do so, for here is Tudit. Will you care to come up into the village, or will you stay here and make a sketch?" she asks, pulling the tiller-rope, making the boat cut into a tiny sand-reach where it grounds at once.

"What do you advise me to do? Is Tudit worth seeing, or isn't it? That's the momentous question. If it is not I will stay here and take care of the boat while you are gone."

"There is not much to see; you will do better by staying and making a sketch," she says, jumping out on to the little strip of silvery white sand, Zuluva after her.

"So be it then. Don't leave me alone too long, that's all I beg of you," he rejoins, as the girl walks away up the wooded slope leading to the little town of Tudit, just showing through the trees in the distance, and is soon lost to sight.

Alan lit a cigarette, and taking out his sketch-book worked a few moments, then stopped and contemplated his work.

"I never felt less inclined to do anything than I do now. The *dolce far niente* has got hold of me, that is clear," he meditates, puffing at his cigarette.

"What a thoroughly honest-hearted, untrammelled child that is, for she is but a child though she may be just twenty," he went on communing with his own thoughts. "It does one good to meet with such a fresh specimen of the weaker sex. I do believe that if I was to be long with that girl I should get very fond of her. There is something very fascinating about her, and I can't quite make up my mind what it is yet. But she is a nice dear little thing. No, I can't work, and I am not going to try to."

Then he stretched himself in the bottom of the boat and smoked two cigarettes.

Thus utterly idle, Olive found him nearly an hour after.

"What a time you have been gone," he says, reproachfully, raising himself up, and taking his seat as before.

"Not an hour," Olive answers. "I went to see one or two old people I know at Tudit, and I never can get away from them," getting into the boat.

"I suppose not. One never can from those sort of people," he says, jokingly. "I began to think you had forgotten poor me altogether. Once or twice I thought I would come and ferret you out—"

"But you were too lazy," puts in Olive, smiling at him.

"Perhaps I was. Are we to go back now, or 'onwards, but whither'?"

"Oh, home, please. No more river jaunting to-day for me, or Nemets will descend upon my unlucky head."

"Well, and what about the fête? Are they going to do anything especially hilarious? What's the programme of the entertainment?"

"The Pardon comes first. All the pilgrims go to the fountain and buy a leaden image of St.

Thurian, which is supposed to guard them against all kinds of dangers. The fête comes after the Pardon, when there is a procession of torches, fireworks, and dancing on the grass by the light of immense bonfires."

"I should like to see the dancing; it must be most amusing."

"It's very curious to see. They dance the old Breton dances to the music of the 'binlon' and the 'Cornemuse,' both old kinds of instruments, which make a hideous noise," says Olive, laughingly.

"They are a kind of bagpipe, are they not?"

"Yes, but much worse."

"Heavens! they must be awful then. I think I must go and hear them, and you will come too!" he adds, a little imperatively.

"I am afraid I must say no, because I cannot say yes!" answers the girl, sorrowfully shaking her pretty head in its straw hat.

"I will not take no for an answer now," he puts in, quickly; "you must think about it, and see if it cannot possibly be managed somehow or other."

"It is no good my thinking about it, for I do not see how it can be managed. I am sure Miss Daunt will not let me go if I ask her, so I had much better say no at once, indeed I had."

"Say yes instead," he urges once more; "it's a much pleasanter word to hear than no. Come, we are getting close home now. The stream has brought us back in just half the time that it took us to go. Say yes! do."

"But what is the use of my saying yes if I cannot come after all?" she queries, wrinkling her pretty brows doubtfully.

"But you will come!" he puts in, with emphasis.

"Ship your right oar, or we shall go past the landing stage," she calls out quickly, for he was so busily engaged in urging his demand for an affirmative that he has not noted the necessity for doing so.

He obeys her instantly; only just in time, though, and she clings fast to the iron ring in the staple, which always holds the boat fast.

Olive jumps out quickly, before he can offer to help her, and fastens the chain in the ring.

"Come," he begins again, "you have not answered my question yet. I can be quite as obstinate as you when I choose. Will you try and manage it?"

"Oh, I will try," she answers, dubiously; "but I warn you that it is very improbable that I shall succeed."

"If you don't I shall think it is because you do not want to go with me," he says the next moment.

"Then you will think quite wrongly," Olive answers, earnestly; "I do want to go; and I should very much like to go—with you, in rather a smothered voice."

"Then come—please come!" most entreatingly.

And with a handshake, they part.

Oh! Fate, Fate! what have you been doing this glorious summer day? Why could you not leave human hearts in peace? Have you done a wise or foolish thing with your meddling?

Ah! who can answer this!

"Zonave!" murmurs Olive, confidentially to her dog in her soft, sweet voice, as they reach the mill gate under the chestnut tree; "if I ever do have a lover, I think I should wish him to be like—Alan Chichester!"

CHAPTER IX.

"O Life! how pleasant is thy morning;
Young Fancy's rays the hills adorning;
Cold-pausing Caution's lesson scorned,
We frisk away."

"NANNETTE!"

"Well, Mademoiselle Olive, and what is it?"

"Oh! Nannette, I do so want to go to the Pardon and fête of St. Thurian this year."

The girl said it very yearningly as she sat rocking herself to and fro in the mill kitchen

next morning, while Nannette sat stripping a great bundle of herbs for winter use.

Miss Daunt had gone to an extra mass at the convent on the death of a Sister Brigitte, and Olive had been wandering restlessly about the mill, through the garden, and finally into Nannette's precincts, where the old woman was usually to be found busy at her domestic duties.

Olive's mind was in a state of relentless longing, and she was unable to settle down to anything.

"Indeed, my angel; well go, then," answered Nannette, tranquilly, shredding some sage leaves into a basket at her feet.

"It is very easy to say 'go then,'" grumbled Olive, in her sweet voice, resting her chin on her hands and staring with a melancholy gaze at the bundle of herbs; "very easy indeed. But, how am I to do it: that's the difficulty!"

"And why not, if you wish to much!"

"Because I am perfectly certain Miss Daunt will not let me," responded Olive, with conviction.

"Surely madame would not be so disagreeable if you have set your heart on going to the Pardon!" queried Nannette again. She never thought it wise to openly acknowledge madame's harsh discipline, although she secretly condemned it, and sympathized with 'la petite'; "besides," she added, with a tiny touch of irony in her voice, "Madame could not object to your going to a Pardon, and St. Thurlian was a holy man enough without a doubt."

"I am very certain madame would, though. Don't you remember, Nannette, what a fuss she made last year about my going only for a couple of hours, and with you, too. Besides," Olive added, slowly, "I don't so much care to go in the daytime. I want to go at night."

"Ah! so it is like that!" commented Nannette, shrewdly, a branch of sage in her hand.

"Yes, I want to see all the fun of the fête, the fireworks, the procession of lanterns, and the dancing above all."

"Well, my angel, I certainly do not think madame will allow that," responded the old woman, pursing up her lips, and shaking her snow-white cap steadily to and fro, for she knew there existed very small chance of such a wish being gratified.

"Oh! I must go, Nannette, dear old Nannette, I must indeed. If you only knew how I long to go," said Olive, fervently, clasping her soft brown palms together. "What am I to do! I know Miss Daunt won't let me, so it's little use my asking her; but I must, I must go," she ended, almost despairingly.

A twinkle came into Nannette's beady black eyes at Olive's vehemence.

"Go then, my little one, without the asking," she said, very quietly, still stripping her herb stalks.

The old woman saw no harm in uttering this heretical advice. Where was the harm of the girl going to the Pardon if she wished. She herself could see none.

Madame Rebecca never let the little one enjoy herself in her own fashion; it became necessary sometimes to circumvent madame by a little harmless, innocent deception, and Olive often had some small pleasure by the combined management of Nannette and André which would otherwise have been denied and lost to her.

"That's exactly what I was thinking, Nannette," returned Olive, breaking out into a smile, "only I don't see how I can possibly manage it," wrinkling her pretty brows in an effort to think of some feasible way.

"But it is easy enough for that matter. Just for an hour to see the dances, we will say. Supposing, for example, mademoiselle should have a migraine that evening, a bad headache, we will call it, mademoiselle would of course have to go to bed quite early, n'est-ce pas?" queried the old woman, nodding her head.

"Well, I suppose I should, Nannette," Olive acquiesced, with a smile of merriment on her rosy lips.

"Eh bien! I should then say to madame, 'the poor little mademoiselle is not well, she has gone to bed; I will make her a tisane and take it to her by and bye,' and madame would be quite

satisfied, and go to her bed as usual," went on Nannette, complacently.

"But supposing she did not go to bed as usual!" hazarded Olive, "my migraine would be no use."

"We would wait until Madame did go, then; but I do not fear such a thing. Then I would make a cup of tisane for Mademoiselle—"

"Which I shouldn't drink, for I hate tisanes," interrupted Olive, with a move of aversion.

"Ah! but this one would be a pleasant tisane, my angel. A little syrup and water, that is all. But having told Madame I would make a tisane, of course I should have to do it, for my good conscience sake, see you," rejoined the old woman, her beady black eyes twinkling brightly.

"I think I could manage to drink that," assented Olive, after a pause.

"It would not be absolutely necessary for mademoiselle to drink it unless she pleased. I should simply place it on mademoiselle's table for her to do as she liked. For me I should then say at the door, 'bon soir, mademoiselle Olive. I hope the morning will find you better, and that the tisane I have made you will do you good,' then I should leave the door ajar, and after that, Chut!" with a shrug and a nod, "It would be no affair of mine."

Which meant that Olive might then slip away for an hour's pleasure if she chose. The old woman would be as secret as the grave.

"But Nannette," said the girl, hesitating at the tempting plan laid before her, "don't you think I should be running a great risk if I followed your advice?"

"That is for you to decide yourself, my mademoiselle," returned Nannette, placidly. "I give no advice, I simply say it is easy enough if you so wish to go to the Pardon."

"I do, I do indeed wish it," answered Olive, ardently.

"Well, I cannot see myself there remains any other way," with another shrug; "It is a summer night, just for one hour, no more. I will watch for your coming, and let you in by this door through the garden; but please yourself, as I said before," she ended, sorting the herb stalks she had stripped, to be tied in little bundles, and hung up from the oak rafters in the kitchen.

"If I pleased myself I should go," rejoined Olive, in a frenzy of indecision. "Oh! Nannette, do you think it would be very wrong if I did please myself! I don't want to do anything really wrong. I know Miss Daunt would say it was if I asked her; but then she says everything almost is wrong. I must have a very ill-regulated mind I suppose," with a heavy sigh.

"My mademoiselle, God made us all, we cannot help our natures. You are young now, you want to see life, *à bien!* I was like that in my youth. Now a fête—a Pardon, is nothing to me, nothing, my angel. You will feel just like that some day. If there were any real harm in just going for one hour to see the dances, I, for one, would never counsel it, be very sure," with a shake of her head.

The old woman spoke as she thought. To her the Pardon was a kind of religious festival as well as a fête. It came but once in the year. All the folks went to see, why should not the little mademoiselle! It was but a very small gaiety after all. Madame's disapproval was quite nonsensical and over-strained; she was too strict in her system of bringing up the young, according to Nannette's idea.

"And my André shall go with you, if that is all," pursued Nannette; "he shall take you there and bring you back to the mill, if you wish, and, indeed," the old woman added, with some judgment; "it would perhaps be as well for you to have someone with you, since the time will be night; better in company than alone. My André would take you where you wished. For me, I could not go, I am getting too old for such gaieties now; and, besides, madame might take it into her head to want me, and then, *Sapristi!* what would not happen if she found, too, the young bird had flown from the nest as well as the old one. That would not be wise at all. No, André shall be with you."

For the old woman thought, supposing b

chance it reached to the ears of madame afterwards, the fact of the old man being Olive's companion might ameliorate the situation a good deal.

Nannette had really no idea of any wrong-doing in her advice about going to the Pardon of St. Thurlian. It was only right and proper to go to a Pardon, and of a Saint too. It was only Madame Rebecca's absurd severity which could think otherwise.

Such a simple amusement besides—nothing harmful in the smallest degree. It was very natural she should want to go and see; but since she was a little one no longer, old André should go as well in the shape of guardian.

"Yes," reflected the old woman, finally, "my old mari shall go with you. He will never whisper one word, as you know."

Olive gave a little quick conscious laugh as the old woman ended her speech.

"You dear old thing," she returned, rather nervously. "I don't want your André, because—well, because I shall have someone else to take care of me," ending up rapidly.

"Ah, ah!" commented Nannette, stopping her herb stripping for a moment to look over at the girl, "so it is to be like that!"

Olive nodded, and came over to the table on which Nannette was seated among her herbs.

The old woman guessed shrewdly at once what Olive meant by "someone else," and also who that "someone" was.

"It is for that reason then that you are so anxious to view the Pardon of St. Thurlian this year!" queried Nannette again, with a gleam of amusement in her beady eyes; "that is the way the little wind blows its breath, my mademoiselle, is it!" and Nannette bound a handful of marjoram in a little bundle as she spoke.

"Yes, Nannette!" answered the girl, monosyllabically, resting her elbows on the table, and bringing her sweet young face on a level with the old wrinkled features opposite.

Nannette was silent a minute or two, then she began slowly and kindly.

"My angel, is it wise!"

Since the old woman had heard of the probability of a "someone else," the affair presented rather a different complexion to her. She had no knowledge of the social code which would strictly forbid such a proceeding, but some small natural instinct made her say,—

"My angel, is it wise!"

"I want to go with him, Nannette!" pursued the girl, feverishly; "you don't know how nice and friendly he is."

"I do not doubt it, my mademoiselle," rejoined the old woman, briefly.

"And it is so pleasant to have a companion. He will not be in Pont l'Abbaye long; why should I not be friendly with him while he is here!"

"Truly as you say, why not?" acquiesced the old woman, but not too readily it must be owned. Indeed she acquiesced doubtingly, for she had seen the fallacy of a vaunted friendship betwixt a young man and a girl before now. It did not always end as it began. If this one was only going to love and ride away, it might be wiser to try and keep the girl heart-whole if possible, and Nannette also knew that propinquity is the very enemy of prudence, and nearly always sets the heart a-beating.

But what was the use of always looking forward in this world, it never altered things in the slightest degree. What was to be, would be, Nannette sagely admitted to herself, excusingly; whether she helped the girl in her desire, or whether she did not, it would be certain to make no difference.

"Now I have told you my secret, what would you advise me to do, Nannette?" Olive asked, breaking the silence, which had been devoted by both to purposes of cogitation, though of diverse kinds.

"My mademoiselle, I will advise no more," answered the old woman. "You must now decide for yourself. If it is to go, of course I will do all I can to help you, and whisper nothing of it to a soul, but madame should hear and scold you for your pleasure."

"Which she would do most emphatically if

she did hear. I should probably be punished by never being allowed to go out again, or obliged to follow her to the convent every day where the nuns would be instructed to preach long homilies to me by the hour together, which would drive me quite mad I am sure. I should be eternally sermonized on my misdeeds past and present, on those things which I hadn't done, as well as those I had committed. Oh! dear me it would be simply awful, Nannette, I dread to even think of it!" with a small shiver of real disgust.

"By staying away such a thing could not then happen," continued the old woman, with a smile; "if you dread so much, do not go."

"Oh, I must, I must, I must!" cried Olive, in an ascending scale of miserable and undecided yearning, clasping her hands together with fervour.

"Well, let us say no more then. You decide to go. *Et bien* it is fixed. There is still however one little thing not to be forgotten, if you are seen at the Pardon with your friend and alone."

"That is the worst part of it," said Olive dimly, "everyone knows me so well about here, that Miss Daunt might easily hear of it. Someone would be sure to mention it to her, just to see what she would say or do, very likely. Then 'Dante's Inferno' would be nothing to my life for a little time. If I could only disguise myself in some way or other, so that no one would know me. Can't you help me, Nannette! Do think of something, there's a dear!"

"Stay; I have a little idea," interrupted Nannette, ceasing to shred her herbs. She saw how ardently the girl longed to go. It might not exactly be wise, but it was only natural after all. Besides, there was a spice of adventurous romance about it which secretly pleased the old French woman, and made her not indisposed to further any scheme for carrying out Olive's longings.

"Listen now to what I say," she went on, impressively; "supposing mademoiselle were to dress herself up as a peasant girl, how would it be then?"

"Oh! what fun. It would do splendidly, you dear old Nannette," cried Olive, jumping up and giving the old woman a hug in her excitement; "but where could I get the clothes from, and how could I alter my face?"

"An easy affair enough if you will but listen, and not choke me first," answered Nannette, comically. André shall ride into Qutnspaire, and get a little blonde wig from the coiffeur. No one will know what it is for, he will but hire it for two days, we will say. That will alter the whole face at once, with perhaps a little brown stain on the skin. As for the clothes, you shall wear the brown dress and lace cap that belonged to my poor Jeanne who died, as you know, of fever in Rome, where she had taken service. They sent me her clothes after, and I keep them still. The dress and cap are little worn, and will fit you well. Satisfy! no one will know you then. You must keep most in the darkness, and not laugh too loud with your friend," smiling shrewdly.

"Oh! Nannette, it will be like going to a fancy ball," exclaimed Olive, with a tiny gasp of delight. "I have always longed to go to a costume ball. You must make my skin very brown, mind, and I shall wear the wig well down over my forehead. You are the dearest old thing in the world, Nannette, I do believe," and Olive kissed each wrinkled cheek.

"There, my angel, let me go on with my work. The little affair is settled then. It is to be like I have said. Very good, it shall be all arranged for you," and Nannette nodded her head with infinite self complacency.

"Zouave I come here, and just attend to what I say," said Olive, going to the door, kneeling on the threshold, and taking the dog's head between her hands.

Zouave's eyes intimated that he was all attention.

"I am going to the Pardon of St. Thurian but you cannot come with me; do you understand?"

Zouave wagged his tail dubiously.

"You will have to stay at home, my sweet old dog—you must, indeed; because if you go, you'll betray me. You will have to be shut up in my room, and you must not try to get out. Promise me you will not try to follow me," she said softly, in an undertone.

Zouave stopped wagging his tail, and gazed up into her face with his luminous, beautiful, round eyes. What did his little mistress mean? Something in her voice was different to its usual harmony. It was not anger, or sorrow, or melancholy, or even wistful like it was sometimes when she spoke to him. It sounded like a new voice, with a fresh, sweet cadence in it he had never heard there before.

"Zouave!" murmured the girl, tenderly, once more, "don't look at me with such reproachful eyes. I do not deserve it—indeed I do not. I love you just the same as I did, just as much as before, my own dear, faithful old doggie. Not one atom less because I have found a new friend. I feel happy, Zouave, quite happy. I do not know exactly why, or wherefore. Perhaps it is because of having found a new friend. It may be so, but I am not sure of it."

"But I am," murmured the old woman to herself, over her thyme, and marjoram, and sage stalks, as she heard the girl talking thus softly to her dog. "As for being a friend! well, we women always commence like that. It sounds better, I suppose. Poof! but the ending is not always so simple and sweet. Well, time will show. Why should she rest all her days here! For the old it is calm and peaceful enough, but for the young—bah! let them stretch out their pretty wings if they wish, and fly away. One is never young twice, that is very certain!" and with this sage axiom, Nannette tied up her last little bundle of herbs.

Olive did not hear the old woman's murmur, for she had gone upstairs to get her lace pillow, and try to occupy her restless fingers about something.

As for Zouave, he laid himself down in the sunshine outside the kitchen door, his dog's mind harassed with a vague knowledge that there was something abroad in the air about Moulins he could not define what.

Fate had begun to roll its little ball in earnest and the toy was a human heart, that was all.

CHAPTER X.

"Oh! thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate!
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate!"

TIME reaped four whole days, and bound them with his sheaves of weeks, months, years, that go to make up the sum of our earthly tenancy before eternity sets in, and Time is for us poor humanity of no more account.

He had no remors about putting in his "dickie keen" among these days and gathering in his harvest of them, for it is just as much his business to be husbandman in this manner as the harvest labourer hired to reap the golden-ripened grain, lying ready to be shorn.

Four whole August days, and Olive saw nothing of Alan Chichester!

The first day she thought but little of it. The second she began to think about it in an odd, desultory sort of fashion, not wholly pleasant, neither wholly disagreeable—a kind of small wonder as to where he was, what he was doing, and so forth. On the waning of the third day the absence struck her as strange, unaccountable, and, to be perfectly truthful, in no wise delightful to her feelings. Where could he be! Had he gone!—by some dreadful mischance left Pont l'Abbaye for good and all, without even saying good-bye! The idea was almost calumnious, and filled her mind with no small dismay.

It is not pleasant to lose one's friend just as one is beginning to find a pleasure in the acquaintance. In fact, she felt it quite a hard loss, and one to besom in a quiet, unobtrusive way. To herself, at least, no disguise of her reflections on the matter was necessary.

On the evening of the fourth day, that old

Time chose to garner into his barn, the girl was most positively and emphatically miserable.

He had gone; there was evidently no doubt of it. He could not have been in Pont l'Abbaye for those four long days, and she not to have seen something of him during that period.

No, he had departed from the little Breton village, and forgotten all about her; all about the fête, and desire she should go—about everything, in fact, their short friendship, and mutual liking. Yes! everything, she told herself, mournfully.

She should never see him again; never see those deep grey, kindly, pleasant eyes smiling at her, or hear those friendly, cheery tones any more, for he must be gone. The thought was almost more than she could bear to dwell on.

Her pleasant dream was over. It had been a pleasant one, she would not deny it, while it lasted, though only so short a time; and it made the lonely future more dreary-looking than ever she reflected wearily.

Well, nothing remained to be done now but to go back to the quiet, uneventful and monotonous round of daily life, unbroken by any kindred spirit in the matter of companionship.

"Oh! Zouave! I do think he might have just said good-bye to me before he went, don't you?" said Olive, very wistfully, on this identical fourth evening, swinging her straw hat to and fro, as she stood in the front of the mill by the still pool, watching the flattering white fountains devouring their supper of maize, which she had at that moment thrown down for them.

Zouave stood looking on too—one ear stuck up stiffly, while the other fell drooping. He looked up into the melancholy face of his little mistress with some compassion and sympathy, and gave a few slow wags of his stumpy black-cropped tail. I think he most thoroughly agreed in Olive's plait.

"He might have let me know he was going, for I should have liked to bid him good-bye!" she murmured again, with soft bewailment, throwing down the last few grains of maize remaining in her measure. "Come, my dog, the pigeons have had their supper; you and I will go down to the river, and have a little row on the water to calm our ruffled feelings. At least mine are; I do not know about yours, but mine are very ruffled indeed, I don't mind confiding to you. In fact, you dear old thing, I feel really miserable, to tell you the truth, and it would not take very much to make me cry. Fancy, Zouave, to shed weak, ignoble tears, to be a thorough, stupid baby, and all about a man, too! Bah! I am ashamed of myself for feeling so despondent over such a small, silly affair," and Olive gave one of her little feet a sharp stamp on the moss-grown ground in self-indignation.

It is always far harder to part with anything after one has felt the pleasure of possession than if one has never had it at all; and this was just the case with Olive.

She and the dog wandered in melancholy fashion down the creek, and got into the old wherry, swinging softly and gently at its chain.

"Now I am here I don't feel one atom inclined to row. I don't feel desirous of doing anything. I want someone to row me; that's the fact of the matter, I suppose. But I shall not get what I want in this case, it's very certain, Zouave," said the girl, leaning over the side of the boat to watch the water eddying past, awaying the great water-weeds as it ran.

"How lonely it is here! I wonder I never found it out before. Quite lonely, my dog! Only you and I now—no one else. No sketched on the bank, no finding a drawing portfolio, no rowing to Tadit and back. Never again. All gone for ever, and ever, and ever. Poor, lonely you and I!"

The glorious brown eyes gazing into the swiftly-running stream grew limpid and heavy with what I sadly fear were unshed tears, as she ended her soft, sweet, sorrowful wail.

"I was quite happy four days ago, I do believe really happy; but I am not a bit happy now. Quite the reverse, in fact. I'm miserable, Zouave. There, only look at me, I believe I am crying a little. A tear fell on my hand then,

There comes another. Oh! it's horrible of me, shameful, disgraceful. I will not shed tears about nothing like this—foolish, senseless tears. Why should I? I have literally nothing to cry about, I am sure, except my own sins, and I have never done that before. But I feel despondent, dreadfully depressed, and perhaps a tear or two will do me good. I hope it may. I want something to do me good. If Miss Daunt heard me she would say 'fiddlesticks,' if she ever indulged in such a common-place, not to say vulgar, expression, which I do not think she would. It might more likely be 'Olive, how dare you be so idiotic!' and I dare say she would be perfectly justified in saying so. I've no doubt I am an idiot, but a very miserable one, at any rate. Very, very miserable! and the great brown eyes grew limpid and crystal once more.

"A fair good even to you, lady!" said a voice from the bank. "I need not say we are well met, since thus we meet once more," he quoted on.

Olive gave a sudden great start when she heard that voice. Lost in her painful reverie, she had neither seen or heard him coming from under the trees; moreover, the ripple of the water had covered the sound of his footsteps.

She turned her head towards him, and a soft flush and glow lit up all her face. He was here in the flesh, not gone, not left Pont l'Abbaye without a farewell. It was delightful. At that moment all her haunted misery departed. Standing there with all his six feet of handsome manhood, grey eyes, kind voice, smile and all, her whole heart leapt at the sight for very gladness.

She recognised then how keenly she had felt his absence, how almost unbearable had been the idea that he had gone away, without one single expression of farewell.

She rose up in the boat, stepped to the wooden landing-stage, and held out her hand to him at once, looking up with unspoken pleasure in her very glance.

"Did I startle you so much?" he asked, taking it, and looking carefully at her. Perhaps the limpidity had not yet dried out of those beautiful brown eyes, and he noticed it. It may have been the case; I am not positively certain about it, but I think his voice lost some of its jesting ring as he added; "you gave such a tremendous start when I spoke that I thought you were going to jump clean out of the boat, and take an impromptu dive to get away from me. I hope you did not want to do that!"

"I suppose I started because I did not expect to see you. I thought you had gone away!" she answered, simply.

"Gone away for good, do you mean?"

Olive nodded.

"Whatever made you think of such a thing as that?" he queried, earnestly.

"Because I had not seen you since last Friday," said the girl, truthfully.

Mind you, it was not in Olive's nature to be Machiavellian, or anything but outspoken. It did not strike her that perhaps in a case of this kind it might be as well to pretend a small amount of indifference on the subject, even if one had it not. She did not dream of any such society pretence, but only spoke just as she thought about it.

"If I had had any intention of running away from Pont l'Abbaye so soon, you might have been very certain that I should not; I might say, instead, I could not go without saying good-bye before I left. It would have been very bad manners indeed, especially after you have been so kind to me," he ended, a little gravely.

"But you have not gone, you see," puts in Olive, lightly, and the dimples come in her pretty cheeks.

She cannot, for the life of her, help letting him see that she is glad, really and honestly glad at heart.

And Alan does see it with secret satisfaction.

After all, the knowledge that one is appreciated in any degree is never unwelcome to any of us, great or small.

"Of course not; Pont l'Abbaye is much too charming a little place to leave just yet; but for

all that, I have been away three out of the last four days.

"Away!" echoed Olive. "Where did you go to then?"

"Well, I took a little journey down to Nantes to present some letters of credit to the bankers there. Even in Pont l'Abbaye I find one spends one's money, and I was beginning to run short; so as I had every intention of remaining here a short time longer—at any rate, over this portentous fête to which I know you are coming with me—I felt I must fill my purse which was getting very empty. When I got to Nantes and presented said letters of credit, the head of the firm was away for two days, and I had to wait until he returned, having given him no notice of my coming to draw. Then I found the town so interesting that I stayed one more day, which made up the four, with to-day. I have not long returned to the hotel. Quite a long history of my doings, is it not? If I had only thought for one moment that you might imagine me departed altogether in peace, I should assuredly have sent you a notice to the contrary effect; but I really never contemplated such a contingency. I didn't suppose you would think even of the comings and goings of a fellow like me," he ended slowly.

And all the time in his heart he knew she did think of his comings and goings. Had he not read it plainly enough in her face, in those splendid soft brown eyes of hers, which gleamed and melted in turn just as the girl's mind felt?

Alan's heart, too, beat ever so little quicker as he sat down beside her on the wooden bench under the deep-leaved, shady alders by the river.

For a few moments neither spoke, as if not wishing to break the harmony of the scene before them. Then he said, in his usual quiet voice,—

"So you really and truly thought I had gone?"

"Yes," answered Olive briefly.

"What a nervous jump you gave when I spoke! So lost in musing, that you never heard me coming? What were you thinking about in such an abstracted manner?"

"Oh! many, many things," Olive returns, ambiguously.

"Tell me one of them, then!" Alan demands, after a pause.

"One of them?" she repeated, meditatively, "let me think. Well, one of them, since you want to know, was whether all my life from now is always going to be like it is at present; never anything different; if I shall live, die and be buried in Pont l'Abbaye; buried in that little cemetery under the hill, and be forgotten."

"What a dreary, morbid fancy! One unworthy of a young fresh life like yours should be."

"Should be, perhaps, but is not," she answers, wearily. "I lead a purposeless, useless life; say what one will, I sometimes wish it was all over and finished, and that I was already in that little country graveyard yonder out of sight for ever."

"I do not think you are wise to indulge in such morbid day-dreaming," he urges, gently. "Such fancies do one more harm than good, believe me."

"It is not morbid fancying, but sober, practical reality, which I see in front of me. The future seems an irksome question difficult to answer."

"Are you not happy here then? Do you wish for a different existence to this Arcadian one you are leading now? Are you so very discontented with your present lot?" Alan asks again.

(To be continued.)

In every street in the towns of Japan there is a public oven, where, upon paying a trifling sum of money, houseowners may have their dinners and suppers cooked for them.

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per pair and upwards.
THREE GOLD MEDALS.
Sold by the principal Drapers and Ladies' Outfitters.

A LARGE part of Cuba is occupied by impenetrable forests, not more than 10 per cent. of the island being under cultivation.

FACETIÆ.

CALLER: "I greatly like the tone of that picture." Mrs. Shoddie: "Oh, I wouldn't buy anything that wasn't high-toned."

UNCLE BOB: "Well, Johnny, are you at the head of your class?" Johnny: "No, but I can lick the fellow that is!"

WILLIE: "Pa, what's a p-h-l-l-a-n-t-h-r-o-p-i-s-t?" Pa: "My son, he is a man who spends his time inducing other people to spend their money for charity."

"WHISKY," said the temperance lecturer, "will destroy everything there is in a man." "Yes," replied the unregenerate, "except his throat."

OLD LADY: "She is such an atrocious child." Mother: "Don't you mean precocious?" Old Lady: "I expect I do; but it amounts to the same thing, anyway."

FARMER HAYRICK: "What's that noise?" Mrs. Hayrick: "It's Jane cultivating her voice." Farmer Hayrick: "Cultivating, eh? If I'm any judge, that's harrowing!"

"I NEVER give money to beggars on the street," said the pedestrian. "Oh, very well," replied the seedy individual. "Here's my card; kindly call at my office and leave your contribution with my bookkeeper."

MRS. HARBELLY: "You have been flirting with my daughter, and last night you even went so far as to kiss her. Now, I want to know what your intentions are!" Boarder: "My intentions, madam, are never to do so again."

HE (despondently): "Our marriage will have to be postponed. I have lost my situation, and haven't any income at all." She (hopefully): "That doesn't matter now, my dear. We won't need any. I have learned how to trim my own hair."

"NATIONS and women are a good deal alike." "In what way?" "Well, when one woman gets a new hat her neighbour wants to go right away and get a better one, and when one nation builds a new warship all the others start right out to get bigger ones."

"Oh, Edward," she cried, "do you know what I dreamed last night that you had told me to buy that beautiful £5 hat I spoke of the other day." "Well, that proves it," he replied. "Proves what, dearest?" "That dreams go by contraries." Then she was sorry she had not begun the day as usual by scolding him.

MRS. RAMBO (on the inside of the front door): "Abolom, you have been drinking again!" Mr. Rambo (on the outside): "No, m' dear, I—." Mrs. Rambo: "Say 'prompt payments patiently pursued produce prosperity.' Mr. Rambo: "Prompt payments patiently pursued pos—." Mrs. Rambo: "Abolom, you can get up to your room by the back door."

"I SUPPOSE," she said, at the breakfast-table, "that you know something about the open-door policy?" He nodded. "Am I right in believing that you consider it extremely desirable?" she asked. Again he nodded. "Nevertheless," she went on, "I desire to state that it will be suspended in this house unless you get away from business earlier than has been your custom."

MAUD WINTERGREEN, said the astonished and mortified young man, "are you going to throw me over for that dull, prosy old Scraggs?" "Mr. Spoonmore," freely replied the young woman, rising to signify that the interview was over. "Mr. Scraggs may not be as poetic as you are, but 'he' rhymes with 'me,' and 'you' don't!"

CONSTANCE, the beautiful maiden, struggles desperately in the water. "Save me!" she shrieks. Harold, the brave youth, standing upon the shore, throws aside his coat. "Are you sinking for the third time?" he asks. "Oh, dear! I forgot to count! How stupid of me!" cries Constance, in much confusion. Harold is as brave as a lion, truly, but he will scarcely risk violating what is perhaps the most cherished convention of romance.

HANDEL BARRS: "Going to have a new bicycle this year?" Sprockett: "Going to do better than that. Have decided upon having a 1901 wheel." Handel Barrs: "How are you going to do that?" Sprockett: "Have my 1895 wheel dated ahead, that's all."

STUBB: "That is a lazy tenant Grafton has on his farm. Grafton told him to put up two signs—one 'Beware of the Dog,' and the other 'Beware of the Bull.'" Penn: "Did the tenant obey the order?" Stubb: "Not exactly; he painted only one sign, and when Grafton went out there he was astonished to see 'Beware of the Bulldog.'"

"My wife's the most helpless creature," complained the much-abused man. "Really?" asked his friend in some surprise. "Yes. I no more than get settled to read my evening paper than she calls to me to reach the candle down from the shelf and light it for her, so she can see her way to get a scuttle of coal from the cellar."

"THE secondarily old skinflint!" he cried. "He broke off my engagement with his daughter." "Opposed your suit, did he?" "No, he didn't—he told her I was a model young man, and, of course, she lost interest in me the moment she found I didn't need the ennobling influence of a woman to lift me up and spur me on to success."

"WHAT I like," she said, "is a person who is frank—one who says just what he means, without beating about the bush." "Well," he returned, "I'd be straightforward. There is something I wanted to tell you for an hour or more, but—" "Yes," she urged, with suppressed excitement, seeing that he hesitated, "what is it?" "There is a big black streak down one side of your nose. I think it's soot."

JAMES, whispered the good woman, "there's a burglar in the parlour. He stumbled against the piano in the dark. I heard several of the keys struck." "All right!" said James, "I'll go down." "Oh, James, you're not going to do anything rash!" "Certainly not. I'm going to help him. You don't suppose he can get that piano out of the house without assistance, do you?"

A GENTLEMAN travelling on the Great Northern Railway, having delivered his luggage to the care of a porter, proceeded to make himself comfortable in the corner of a first-class smoking-carriage. The porter, having performed his duty, came to the carriage for the reward of merit. "Well," said the gentleman, "I see the letters G.N.R. on your cap. 'Gratuities never received,' I imagine it means?" "A little mistake, sir," replied the porter; "it should be 'Gratuities never refused.' And the way that porter smiled when he joined his comrades betokened satisfaction at the result of his smart answer."

"HAVE you got any watermelon on ice?" inquired the man with the basket on his arm. "No, sir," replied the young man with the eyeglasses. The customer was about to go when the young man stopped him. "We haven't any melons on ice," he said, "but we have some under ice. It keeps them cooler that way. Heat rises and cold descends, you know. Will one be enough?" "I reckon it will," rejoined the man with the basket. "But I'm going elsewhere to get it. I don't believe I can afford to trade at a grocery shop where they keep scientists for clerks. Afternoon, sir."

ONE may be excused for feeling a little joy when the man who goes out of his way to make a rude remark in order to display his wit receives a rebuke that is as courteous as it is at the same time effective. The retort given by a certain learned scientist must have been considerably more amusing to the onlookers than it was to the learned gentleman's antagonist. It happened at a dinner that one of the guests began to deride philosophy, and went on rudely to express the opinion that philosopher was but another way of spelling fool. "What is your opinion, professor?" he asked. "Is there much distance between them?" The professor, with a polite bow, to his vis-à-vis responded gravely: "Sometimes only the width of a table!"

IN some rural districts there are held annually hiring fairs, where farmers and others attend to engage servants. At one held in Gloucestershire last autumn a farmer opened negotiations with a lad who seemed suitable for his purpose. Various questions having been asked and answered, the farmer inquired at last:—"Hast got a character from thy last place?" "No," replied the boy; "but my old gaffer be about somewhere, and I can get he to write I one." "Very well," was the reply, "thou got it and meet I here again at four o'clock." The time came, so did the farmer and the boy. "Hast got thy character?" was the query. The answer came short and sharp. "No; but I ha' got thine, and I beea's a-coming."

AFTER they had kissed each other and each had disposed of a chocolate to show that there was no ill-feeling between them, the blonde said:—"So Mabel is married!" "So I've heard," returned the brunette. "Nice girl," ventured the blonde. "Oh, very," returned the brunette. "I wouldn't say a word against her for the world." Neither would I. How do you suppose she ever got him?" "I'm sure I don't know. Do you?" "No; I would give anything to know." "So would I. It certainly wasn't her beauty." "Oh, no!" "Or her cleverness." "The idea is absurd." "I can't understand it at all. They say she was married by the registrar first and afterwards at the church." "I shouldn't wonder. She naturally wanted to make awfully sure of him." "Of course. It is the only way she could keep him. But I am glad she has caught some one. Mabel is a dear girl, and it would be cruel to say anything against her." "Indeed it would. I wouldn't do it for the world!" "Neither would I."

HOSTESS: "I presume you heard of many strange happenings while you were in the diamond fields of South Africa?" Traveller: "Indeed I did, madam. One of the most valuable stones ever found was picked up by a couple of children and used by them as a jack-stone." "Indeed!" "Stranger still, the father of the children had no idea that the stone was a diamond, and sold it to a trader for a few pennies." "My! My!" "Then the trader sold it for a fortune." "A fortune!" "Yes; but now comes the strange part of the story. No other stone of any value was ever found in that neighbourhood." "Well, I declare. That is strange." "But I am not through yet. The strangest part is yet to come—something so remarkable, so utterly out of the common, so far removed from the bounds of human credulity, that I would never have believed it, had I not seen the proof." "Dear me! What is it?" "The trader came back and divided half the fortune with the father of those children."

DASHAWAY: "You called on Miss Tutter the other day, didn't you?" Cleverton: "Yes." Dashaway: "How did you like her?" Cleverton: "Oh! I don't know. So-so! Rather commonplace, I thought." Dashaway: "Well, you made a better impression on her." Cleverton: "How do you know?" Dashaway: "Oh! I saw her last night and she couldn't say enough about you." Cleverton: "Nonsense!" Dashaway: "Oh, no! It's a fact. You must have been in a happy mood, for she thought you extremely interesting." Cleverton: "Did she say that?" Dashaway: "Yes; and a good deal more. Told me that she didn't know when she met a man that was so bright as you." Cleverton: "That's hard to believe." Dashaway: "But she did, old man! Thought you were handsome, too." Cleverton: "Well, well, that's surprising! I was feeling pretty good that night, as I remember." Dashaway: "You must have been, to make an impression like that." Cleverton (immensely flattered): "Well, well! It's hard to believe." (They part, and two hours later Cleverton meets Castleton.) Castleton: "Hello, old fellow! I hear you were around to Miss Tutter's the other night." Cleverton: "Yes; I was." Castleton: "How did you like her?" Cleverton (earnestly): "My dear boy, without any exception, she is one of the prettiest and cleverest girls I ever met in the whole course of my life!"

SOCIETY.

PRINCESS BEATRICE will go abroad for three weeks, rejoining the Queen towards the end of June, shortly after the return of the Court to Windsor from Balmoral.

THE Queen made many purchases in Ireland, chiefly of lace and poplin. For the latter material the Queen has always had a great preference, and once before made it the rage in England; it is now made in richly broadened designs.

A CURIOUS fact about the Queen is that she never wears velvet, has, indeed, always had a distinct aversion to that soft and rich fabric, as she could not bear to touch it. With the Princess of Wales, *au contraire*, velvet is quite a favourite fabric.

PRINCE ALEXANDER OF BATTENBERG, eldest son of Princess Beatrice, who has been a pupil for several years at a private school in the New Forest, near Lyndhurst (where the Duke of Albany was before he went to Eton), has just been sent to Wellington College. It was originally intended that Prince Alexander should join the training ship *Britannia* at Dartmouth, with a view to his entering the Navy; but this plan has been altered, and he will be educated for the Army.

A FRESH impetus will be given to the pictorial postcard craze by the ingenious invention of an Italian, who has hit upon the novel idea of producing a card which not only depicts a scene in colours, but likewise serves as a kind of barometer. According as the atmosphere varies, the colours change on the cards, and the inventor has so contrived that the colours shall be used so as to give each scene illustrated the effect that would be produced under different atmospheric effects.

THE date of the Prince of Wales's visit to Newcastle has been altered from Thursday, June 21st, to Wednesday, the 20th, in order to suit His Royal Highness's engagement at York in connection with the "Royal" Show. The Prince will travel from York to Newcastle and back by special train, and the laying of the foundation-stone of the Diamond Jubilee Infirmary is the only function in which he will take part during his visit, which will last about two hours. The Prince of Wales will dine with the officers of the Prince of Wales's Own Norfolk Artillery at their regimental dinner at the Carlton Hotel on May 31st.

THE Duke and Duchess of York are outgrowing their house accommodation. When the pretty cottage at Sandringham was adapted for their use, it seemed to have quite enough room, but the speedy advent of two sons rendered necessary an enlargement of the premises. Now that two more small members of the family have put in an appearance, it is found that York House, St. James's, is not large enough, so the Queen has granted her grandson the use of some further apartments in the Palace, which are to be connected at Her Majesty's expense with those already forming the Royal residence.

THE German Crown Prince was born in the pretty summer Marmor Palace, near Potsdam, in 1882; that is, in the year following his parents' marriage. He was given the names Frederick William Victor Augustus Ernest, and is not only Her Majesty's eldest great-grandson, but also one of her numerous grandchildren. The Crown Prince has received an education intended to prepare him for high destinies. In addition to the usual studies gone through by all young Germans of high rank, which comprises, by the way, a thorough knowledge of French and English, his Imperial Highness has mastered as much as was possible the arts of war and peace. He has just completed his course at the great Military College of Posen, and, following in this the example of both his father and grandfather, the late Emperor Frederick, he will probably be entered for a while at Bonn University.

STATISTICS.

THE muscles of the human jaw exert a force of 534 lb.

THERE are nearly 2,000 stitches in a pair of hand-sewn boots.

THERE is only one sudden death among women to eight among men.

THE number of persons cremated in Germany from 1878 to 1899 was 3,110.

THE average walking pace of a healthy man or woman is said to be seventy-five steps a minute.

THE tramways, omnibuses, and underground railways in and around London, within a radius of five miles, carry each year about 53,000,000 passengers.

GEMS.

IT is not the place, nor the condition, but the mind alone that can make any one happy or miserable.

FAME will not run after the men who are afraid of her. She makes mock of those trembling and respectful ones who deserve, but cannot force, her favours. The public is won by the bold, imperious talents, by the enterprising and skilful.

IF we could learn to concentrate our mind and effort upon one thing at a time, we should find ourselves with much greater power to do and much less need of rest. It is this dissipation of brain power in different directions that exhausts and sometimes breaks down the physical force entirely.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

SAVOURY BAKED POTATOES.—Peel as many potatoes as will cover the bottom of a large baking-dish. Sprinkle over them half a teaspoonful of dry powdered sage, half a tablespoonful of salt, a quarter of a teaspoonful of pepper, one onion sliced very thin, and one tablespoonful of butter cut into small bits. Pour over all one cupful of milk or soup stock, and bake in a moderate oven for forty minutes.

FISH SCALLOP.—First boil the fish and let it cool; then flake it in large pieces and put a layer of these flakes in the bottom of a buttered baking-dish; cover with a rich cream sauce, and continue these layers of fish and sauce until the dish is full. Cover the last layer of sauce with bread-crumbs, moistened with melted butter, and bake until brown. To make the sauce, melt two tablespoonfuls of butter in a saucepan, and blend in one heaping tablespoonful of flour; add enough milk and cream mixed to make a sauce (when it has boiled a minute or two) of medium thickness. Season with salt, pepper and a little mace. There should be enough sauce to cover each layer of fish generously, so that in serving each piece is in a creamy covering.

FRENCH BEAN AND LETTUCE SALAD.—Ingredients: Two lettuce, a breakfastcupful of cooked French beans, a small cooked beetroot, two hard-boiled eggs, a slice of toast, salad oil, seasoning, two teaspoonfuls of chopped parsley, tarragon and malt vinegar. Just before required, lay a slice of toast without crust in the salad-bowl after first dipping it in the oil. See the lettuces are clean, drain them well, and pull them in small pieces. Never cut a lettuce. Arrange the beans and lettuce and sliced beetroot in layers above the toast. Over the top sprinkle the parsley. Rub the yolks of eggs through a sieve, and arrange the powder in lines over the top. Chop the whites and arrange as a border round. Sprinkle with salt and pepper, and pour over two tablespoonfuls of oil and one of vinegar.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE egg-plant is a native of Asia, Africa, and South America.

DIAMONDS were first discovered in South Africa in 1857.

THE officials of Cores wear upon their hats the figures of various birds and animals.

A CASHMERE shawl weaver in Persia earns by the hardest labour about eighteenpence a day.

THE nearest approach of a comet to the earth observed was in 1770, when one approached to within 1,400,000 miles of our planet.

MORE people over a hundred years old are found in mild climates than in the higher latitudes.

ONLY one per cent. of the telegrams from over seas are concerned with family or private matters. The rest are commercial, journalistic, or official.

GLYCERINE is a by-product of soap and candle factories, and something like 40,000 tons of this commodity are made yearly.

SPAIN was originally formed from fourteen kingdoms, and has an area of 196,174 square miles, and a population of 17,000,000.

IN a naval battle the woodwork and all articles of wood are either stowed below or thrown overboard, lest the men be injured by splinters.

A FACT not very well known is that a little sugar taken with water, not too cold, in case food is not obtainable, will relieve any feeling of exhaustion and sharp hunger.

A SUBSTITUTE for honey has been introduced in Germany under the name of sugar-honey, and consists of sugar, water, minute amounts of mineral substances, and free acid.

To show the antiquity of the art of glass-blowing, painted representations of glass-blowers have been found upon ancient tombs dating from before 2,000 B.C.

A MAN who owns a coconut grove in Venezuela is independent, as the fruit continues to ripen all the year round and brings a good price. Each tree averages an annual income of 51.

A PERSON in robust health walks with his toes pointed to the front, while one with his health on the wane gradually turns his toes to the side, and a bend is perceptible in his knees.

IT is announced that the French Government, looking out for a new source of revenue, has determined to plant fruit trees all along the public high roads of France.

AN Italian doctor has discovered that there is in the common pineapple a substance similar to papaine, and that one pineapple is sufficient to digest 10 lb. of beef.

THERE have been numerous revolts in Cuba against Spanish rule. One of the most formidable lasted from 1869 to 1876, when 145,000 Spanish soldiers were employed to quell the rising.

IN Norway, Sweden, and Finland, women are frequently employed as sailors, and do their work excellently; and in Denmark several women are employed almost as state officials, generally in the pilot service. They go far out to sea in their boats to meet the vessels coming into port, and having nimbly climbed on board and shown their official diplomas, they calmly and coolly steer the new-comer into harbour.

A NEW method of making a durable artificial stone for paving purposes has been successfully introduced in Germany, and is likely to find employment in many countries. The basis of the pavement is, like that of many other systems, coal tar. This is mixed with sulphur and heated, and to the plastic mass is added a preparation of lime. When cold the compound is broken into fragments and mixed with glass or blast-furnace glass slag. Subjected to heavy pressure, the powder is moulded to any form required; and it is found that its resistance to wear and tear is fully half as great as that of Swedish granite. The other advantages claimed for the paving is that its roughened surface gives a good foothold, that it resists changes of temperature, is not noisy, and is easily kept clean.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

M. L.—The Tate Gallery is free.

ARTHUR.—The Bank of England is not a Government institution.

PATRI.—There is no "giving away" in Scotch marriage service.

F. R.—It entirely depends on the conditions of his engagement.

L. J.—The new halfpenny green stamp was on sale on April 17th.

HAL.—We cannot tell; application should be made to the General Post Office.

L. B.—Mr. Balfour is leader of House of Commons; Mr. Gully is the Speaker.

LAURA.—Sanitas removes ink, fruit, and wine stains from white cotton goods.

FARRA.—Scrape the grate with a joiner's chisel or plane iron, finishing with emery paper.

WONDER.—We must decidedly advise you to consult a physician. We cannot give medical advice.

SUFFERER.—A teaspoonful of lemon juice in a cup of black coffee will sometimes relieve a bilious headache.

BURT.—Lord Roberts is in supreme command in South Africa, and all other officers are subordinate to him.

H. S.—All furniture put into a house at term becomes the landlord's security for rent, no matter who it may belong to.

BARBARA.—A polite inclination of the head is sufficient thanks when a stranger opens the door for you in a public place.

GRACE.—We think you were a little hasty in greeting him coldly. So far as we can see, you gave him no chance to explain.

S. R.—The familiarity should be avoided, if only because it is a familiarity which is not sanctioned by strict family etiquette.

GLADYS.—If you meet a man friend in the street it is proper for you to speak first, to show that the acquaintance is pleasant to you.

E. R.—Holders of Victoria Cross receive £10 per annum; in case of holder becoming destitute pension may be increased to £50 per annum.

E. K.—Telegrams sent to persons living beyond the three miles radius of free delivery are charged three-pence per mile postage from the post-office door.

GERTRUDE.—When inkstains on linen are fresh they may be removed by dipping the stained part into buttermilk, letting it soak; then wash out thoroughly.

LEWIS.—Boys desirous to enter the Navy as cadets have to pass an examination, and are then sent on board the *Britannia* for instruction in nautical matters.

MARIE.—There is really no cure that does not endanger greater disfigurement. A constant use of the tweezers, which thousands resort to with success, lessens the evil.

HOUSEWIFE.—The best plan is to wring a clean cloth out of cold salt-and-water, wrap the fish separately in this, put on a dish, and keep in the coolest room in the house.

LALLIE.—To make silk which has been wrinkled appear like new, sponge on the surface with a weak solution of gum arabic or white glue, and iron on the wrong side.

DUTY.—To avoid the accumulation of superfluous flesh, refrain as far as possible from food containing sugar and starch, and take open-air exercise, such as brisk walks.

OLD READER.—In the case of a British soldier taken prisoner of war his arrears of pay may be restored to him on the authority of the general officer commanding after his release.

QUEEN MARY.—When an engagement of marriage is broken off, it is customary for each party to return to the other all letters which have passed between them, also photographs and rings which they have exchanged.

HATTY.—If even after careful skimming there still remain particles of grease floating on the top of soup, lay a piece of clean brown paper over for a moment, so that it just touches the soup, and the grease will cling to it.

WILLIAM.—As the gentleman in question has been your accepted lover for the space of three years, an engagement ring, accompanied by the request that you name an early day, would unquestionably be in order.

CONSTANT READER.—Add two tablespoonfuls of sulphuric acid to a pint of water and steep the silny object in this mixture for a couple of hours; then knead it thoroughly, still keeping it in the liquid, after which wash it well in clean water. You will then have a fresh, elastic and bright sponge.

O. B.—Carefully go over it with stale white bread-crumbs, doing a small space at a time; when the crumbs get soiled throw that batch away and get others, and so proceed till the whole is cleaned. When once all gone over carefully, it is advisable to go over the whole again with a fresh set of crumbs. Before beginning operations carefully dust, brush, and shake well.

D. R.—It is sometimes removed from strong colours by wiping over with a sponge dipped in benzine, weakened with water, and removing excess with blotting paper, finally washing out with warm soapy water.

A. R.—For the insects on your rose bushes, try pure kerosene, through a atomizer. A small quantity will be enough. 2. We would advise you to take your parrot to a bird fancier, who can give you an expert opinion.

J. J.—Mix together equal parts of fine glue, white of egg and white lead, and with it paint the edges of the article to be mended. Press them together, and when hard and dry, scrape off as much of the cement as sticks above the joint.

V. F.—Except it could be shown that the owner knew the dog's propensities for running off in the manner described, and never took any steps to prevent people being harmed by the animal, you would not have a good case for compensation.

E. P.—Deserter has no claim to have previous service placed at his credit, but if on rejoining he has five years of good conduct his commanding officer may include previous service; distinguished conduct on the field would effect same purpose.

ELLA.—A ready-made useful wardrobe for hanging dresses in is made by putting a shelf in a corner of the room about six feet from floor, with a brass rod along its front edge, from which curtains are hung and make the doors of the wardrobe.

V. G.—The husband is entitled only to one-half of what his wife possessed at death, including half of the presents she received from her own friends; the other half must be given up to her brothers and sisters for equal division among them.

IN THE STORM.

My child, your hero may not be,
In truth a hero all the time;
Remember, it must chance that he
Shall still have rugged steep to climb.
Don't place him on too high a plane
In fancy; then he will not fall
In your esteem, and may attain
To something noble after all.

My boy, don't think your sweetheart bears
A halo on her golden hair;
A crown of purity she wears,
And you must help to keep it there.
But she will have her trying moods,
And be not always kind and sweet;
These are life's nursing infirmities—
Bad pitfalls for unwary feet.

You both are far from perfect yet,
And quarrels will, unhappily come—
Both may be wrong; so don't forget,
In anger's blind delirium,
That sweet concessions each must make
And tender promises renew;
Or else a loving heart may break,
And sorrow come to dwell with you.

EDITH.—Lemon juice and salt will remove rust stains from linen without injury to the fabric. Wet the stains with the mixture and put the article in the sun. Two or three applications may be necessary if the stain is of long standing, but the remedy never fails.

W. H.—When a man has been two years resident in the States he can intimate his intention to become a naturalized citizen, and that is recorded; if he goes back at seven years' end and shows that he has held to his intention throughout, he is then granted naturalization papers and becomes a full-fledged citizen.

ANXIOUS.—The right time is when she has found the right man. Of course the custom of hurrying girls into matrimony when they have reached the age of sixteen or seventeen is out of the question. Still, there are many girls at twenty more fit to be married than some at twenty-five. A good husband will help even a very young girl to make a success of marriage.

INTERESTED.—Insanity is sometimes, but by no means "always," an inherited affliction. Those who are most liable to affections of that kind are the over-studious, very nervous, and those who are engaged in sedentary or indoor occupations, the vicious, the intemperate and high livers. Many forms of insanity are curable if promptly and skillfully treated.

ANNE.—Take perhaps a dozen prunes, and if they are the cheap sort, wash and put them in a small jelly can with a tablespoonful of sugar and half a teaspoonful of water; if you have it handy, add a squeeze of lemon juice (it can do without this). Now cover the jelly can with a paper and put it in a small pot with boiling water reaching half-way up the can. Fit on the lid and let the cooking go on for perhaps three hours. It will not come to any harm all that time.

PATTY.—If it is dirty, wipe it over with a cloth wrung out of cold water, rinsing the cloth often, and rubbing till all dirt is removed. Have ready some hot turpentine in which beeswax (half an ounce to a pint) has been dissolved; rub a very little of this well in while still hot, and polish with soft dusters. Washing floorcloth with soap and hot water makes it crack; and if it is cleaned with the beeswax and turpentine once a week, and on other days well rubbed with a duster after sweeping, it will last for years.

JENNIE WALKER.—A clergyman cannot refuse to marry any person under the age of twenty-one, and the parents' consent is not essential, although much to be desired on such an important occasion.

H. E.—Unless the injured man was in some way working for the railway company there is no ground disclosed for a claim of compensation except against the man who injured him; on investigation it may turn out that there was such fault on the part of his employers or their servants as would make them liable, but there must be fault.

CHARLES.—The migration of birds is the result of intelligence and habit, in which the older birds direct the younger ones from generation to generation. Birds of passage, which pass to very distant climes and regions, return to the same localities, and often occupy the same nests, though absent for many months at thousands of miles distance.

FLOWER LOVER.—The primrose is one of the earliest flowers of spring, and in the language of flowers denotes childhood. It was anciently called *Parvulus*, the name of a beautiful youth, who died of grief for the loss of his beloved, Meliora, and was metamorphosed by his parents into a flower, which has since divided the favours of the poets with the violet and rose.

CLAIRE.—If you feel that the young man does not treat you with due courtesy and respect, you should hold yourself aloof, and maintain a cold and distant attitude when you are bound to be in his society. When he realizes that you are not anxious for his companionship, it will probably make him value yours all the more, or it will, at least, put an end to his easy assurance that his presence must always be welcome to you.

VERY ANXIOUS.—Whether a lottery is guaranteed by a government or not it is one of the worst forms of investment we are acquainted with as an investment. It is demonstrable mathematically that if a person were to put the same sum annually for twenty years in the same lottery (however guaranteed) the overwhelming odds would be that he would lose. Better take a certain 5 per cent. for your money.

H. E. H.—As far as can be judged from your letter, unless the widow is execrable, or has administered to the husband's estate, the creditor of her husband has no claim against her. If the husband left no will the son is entitled to the freehold; the widow to one-third of the personal property, and the rest is to be divided after payment of debt between the son of kin, who, in this case, would be the son and daughters.

GERALDINE.—When a glove is too small and splits, it is worse than useless to sew up the rent; it must be patched. Turn the patch inside out, having trimmed the hole round so that the edges are even, and cut the patch of kid to the right size. Then with a fine needle and cotton sew in the patch, taking care only to take up the inside of the kid and to keep the seam flat. If this be done neatly the glove will be nearly as good as new.

EVIE.—Lace is now so daintily fine, and so perfect in its imitation, that it is not likely to go out of fashion. Transparencies are the newest mode, and collars, vests, and other trimmings are disposed over colour or lined with flesh-pink silk to suggest the absence of lining. Very elaborate evening bodices have collars of velvet overlaid with lace, while the neck portions are lined with the palest flesh tint, and have exactly the effect of being perfectly transparent.

LAURA J.—To overcome bashfulness, mingle freely in society, and endeavour to lose self-consciousness. If you are of a nervous temperament and easily confused, you should abstain from the use of everything that excites. Such articles, for instance, as tea, coffee, wine, spices, and tobacco, excite the nerves, and render the action of the heart irregular, and a disturbed physical condition cannot but affect the mental powers. Get rid of your nervousness, and your bashfulness will be more than half conquered.

C. W. J.—William Irvine (not Irving), the American Revolutionary soldier to whom reference is made, was a native of Ireland. He took part with the colonies at the beginning of the Revolution. During the war he was promoted to the rank of brigadier-general, and in 1787 he became a member of Congress. He was also a member of the same body from 1798-1799. He took part in quelling the "Whisky Insurrection" in Pennsylvania, and was prominent in many important movements in the State. He died in Philadelphia, July 30th, 1804.

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THE POWDER AND THE SPARK.

BOTH doctors said the lady would never walk out again, and her condition seemed to justify their opinion. She had lost the power to move. After every big battle thousands of men, more or less crippled, are thrown on the world. But big battles, thank goodness! are rare; and will be more rare as men become more sensible and civilized.

But there are enemies not to be overthrown by force, and who never sign treaties of peace. One of them is the combination of causes which produces the disease called rheumatism. Its victims are everywhere, but especially in countries having variable climates and much wet, fog, and dampness. Take notice, however, that it is not the cold or the wet which directly creates rheumatism. A certain poison in the blood is the primary cause, and the dampness and cold are the *inciting* causes.

In plainer words: the acid in the blood is like a handful of powder in your pocket, and the dampness is like the spark that explodes it. But what manufactures the acid? Let us hear Mrs. Morison's story, and then try to find out.

"It was in the early part of 1886," she says, "that my health began to give way. At first I merely felt unnaturally weak and tired, without being able to explain it. Then my appetite fell off, and I ate much less than my habit had been; and after the little I did eat I had a pain around the chest and a sensation in the stomach as if some living thing were moving there and gnawing me; a most horrible feeling it was.

"A new thing also (to me) was the nasty bitter taste in the mouth that stayed by me all the time, but was worse in the morning. A sour fluid would rise into my throat and mouth which burned and bit at times as strong vinegar does on the tongue. I spat up a deal of thick phlegm, too, and it was often much labour to cough it loose and get rid of it.

"I had four months of this, all the while hoping it would pass away of itself, or that I could find some medicine to cure it. In this I was sadly disappointed, for the complaint fastened upon me closer and harder until by-and-by I began to have attacks of rheumatism, a malady I never had in my life before.

"This went on from bad to worse until my poor body appeared to be full of it. It broke out worst in the joints, as I had so often seen it in others. It took hold of my hands and feet, which got inflamed and hot, so they could hardly bear touching. The pain was terrible, and before long I could not stand on my feet, and had to be put to bed by hands stronger than mine.

"Later on I grew to be so bad I had to take to my bed altogether. I then belonged to the great multitude who are in the world but not of it; who live but can neither work nor take pleasure in living. I was perfectly helpless; I had no power to turn from one side to the other unaided.

"I lost strength until I frequently fainted dead away from sheer weakness. And as for pain, I was never free from it; I did not know what it was to have a minute's real ease. My daughter and a kind neighbour nursed me, and for over a year their task continued; and those who saw me agreed that I was doomed to be a burden on my friends as long as I lived.

"During this time the attending doctor gave me medicines and ordered blisters and embrocations, but none of them had more than a passing effect. Then a second doctor was brought to see me, and *both said I would never walk again.*

"One day my neighbour, Mrs. Murphy, said she believed Mother Seigel's Syrup would help me, as she knew many like cases which it had cured. I began taking it, and was soon much better. I felt easier, and food agreed with me. After this, using the Syrup regularly, I improved, and gained strength rapidly. The rheumatic pains gradually left me, and *in a month's time I was able to walk, and go about my housework.* Since then I have had no return of the ailment, and have credited my wonderful cure to Mother Seigel's Syrup, for surely nothing else did it. You may publish the case as you please."—Mrs. Susannah Morison, 9, Gransden Avenue, London Lane, Hackney, London, June 29, 1899.

The source of the poisons in her blood which gave Mrs. Morison rheumatism was the indigestion which *went before it*. What we have said hundreds of times, we say again—the *fundamental cause of rheumatism is dyspepsia*. Cure the latter and you cure the former. Don't forget this vital fact.

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